

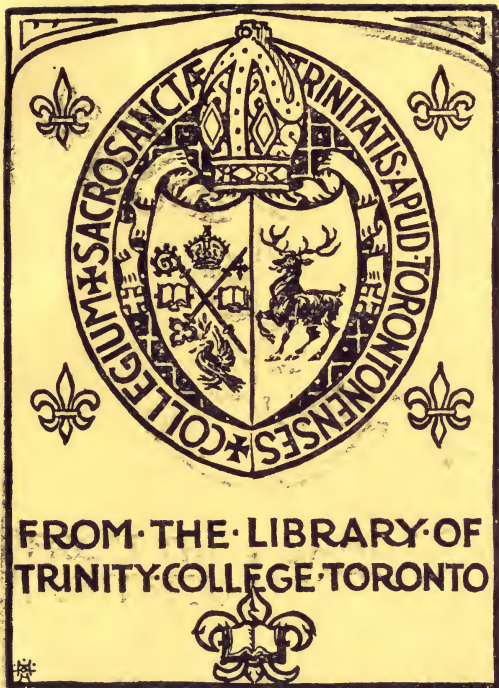
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PARISH SERMONS.

Second Series.

(PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF
S. EDWARD'S, CAMBRIDGE.)

BY THE

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

I DO not think it necessary to offer any apology for the appearance of these Sermons, because it is the result of the reception experienced by a former volume, which I published some years ago, and the several requests which I have received that I would publish more. With the exception of a few verbal alterations, the sermons are printed as they were preached, and to this probably some defects may be due; but (as I remarked in the Preface to my former series) I feared that in the process of altering and remodelling still greater defects might be introduced, and in this fear I believe that all persons accustomed to the composition of sermons will sympathize.

The subjects of the sermons are extremely various: in making a selection for publication I was guided by principles which I need not here explain; but I may say that there appeared to me to be in the case of each some particular feature, which entitled it to occupy a place in the series.

That some measure of usefulness may attend the publication, is the only wish concerning the volume that I have any right, (or I trust) any desire, to cherish.

H. G.

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SERMON I.

CHARACTER OF ESAU.

GENESIS xxvii. 38.

Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

YOU will remember, that in the Epistle to the Hebrews the Apostle holds up the case of Esau as a warning to Christians. He says, "Look diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest there be any fornicator, or *profane person*, as *Esau*, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright: for ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."*

Taking the words of the text in connexion with this Apostolical comment upon them, we may conclude that they contain a worthy subject

* Heb. xii. 15, 16, 17.

for thought to Christians at all times. I wish then in this discourse to offer you some general remarks concerning Esau's character. You will observe that, in the passage from the Hebrews which I have just now read, the Apostle seems to deal with him somewhat severely: he holds him up as a type of character very much to be shunned; he warns Christians to examine diligently and see that there be amongst them none like *him*; he chooses him out of all the Old Testament characters, as the example of a man whom he calls *profane*, a man who preferred the indulgence of his appetite to the strict rule of holiness, and who, when he repented of his folly, found the door of repentance shut against him. Now I think that the first impression would be, that the Apostle had dealt somewhat hardly with the character of Esau: I think especially, that the history contained in the chapter from which the text is taken, would incline us to pity Esau much more than to blame him—to forget his error in selling his birthright, when we remember the shameful manner in which he was defrauded of his father's last blessing.

And let me say here once for all, that I think we have no right to regard that transaction as anything else than a shameful fraud. It is true that in the good providence of God it tended to

bring about His purpose of calling His people in Jacob, and not in Esau; but of course no result can justify that which is itself contrary to the rules of right, otherwise the redemption of the world might well be an apology for the treachery of Judas: let us therefore not think it necessary to withhold our pity from Esau, nor our blame from Rebekah and Jacob. At the same time let us not allow our pity to blind our eyes to the real character of Esau: although the manner in which he was deprived of the blessing be most unrighteous, yet it may be that the loss was only a just judgment upon him; it may be that the loss of the blessing was only a proper punishment for contempt of the birthright.

Let us, then, now examine Esau's character more attentively. And in the first place I will present you with the fair side of it. Unquestionably it has a fair side: Esau was by no means a man of unqualified wickedness or baseness; he had indeed some very noble qualities, and, judged according to the standard of the judgment of many men, would pass, I conceive, for a very worthy, estimable person. Let us take his conduct towards his brother Jacob as a specimen. You will remember, that after Jacob had defrauded him of their father's blessing he was extremely indignant, as he well might be, and in

his wrath he threatened to slay his brother; but this was only a passing burst of rage: although his brother had done him a lasting injury, yet he did not cherish a lasting resentment. Quite otherwise: you will find in Gen. xxxiii., that when Jacob and Esau met each other again, and when Jacob feared exceedingly the effects of Esau's rage, Esau received him with all brotherly affection, never reproached him for his unkindness, but treated him with the utmost forbearance. And if you examine the history, you will find that there is no trace of any revengeful feeling in Esau's mind; his forgiveness of Jacob was free, lasting, and complete. Now, unquestionably this whole history puts Esau's character in a very favourable light: it represents him as an open-hearted generous person, who, though he might be rough in his manners, fond of a wild life, perhaps as rude and unpolished in mind as he was in body, had yet a noble soul, which was able to do what little minds sometimes cannot do, namely, forgive freely a cruel wrong done to him.

And even that selling of the birthright, upon which the Apostle founds the charge of profanity, would admit, in the minds of many persons, of considerable excuse. Let us look at the history: we read in Gen. xxv., that Esau 'one day came from the field weary and faint; that he asked

Jacob for some food; and that Jacob, taking advantage of his hunger, begged of him to sell him his birthright for the food. Esau reasoned thus, "Behold, I am at the point to die, and what good shall this birthright do to me?" Accordingly he sold the birthright: and though no one can quite justify the act, yet it might be said that the conduct of Jacob was far more to be condemned, who took advantage of the hunger of his brother to get possession of that which he had no right to covet. So that, looking upon the whole transaction, I can easily understand, that a person might very much excuse Esau's contempt of his birthright, while he would condemn the manner in which Jacob contrived to extort it from him.

Nevertheless, it is not without reason that the Apostle styles Esau a profane person. I think that in order to gain the whole benefit of his history as an example to ourselves, it is not only permissible but quite necessary, that we should give full credit to all that we can find in his character which is good or amiable; for if he were a man of unqualified bad character, we might be disposed to put aside his example at once, as by no means presenting anything of importance to ourselves; it is just because his character has its fair side, nay, that he is such as many persons would hold up as a model of what

men ought to be, that the contemplation of his failings, the dark side of his character, is full of interest and instruction. So it is that we may read of the punishment of some person of notoriously wicked life, without regarding it much as a warning; we may take it for granted, that as we do not lead such a profligate life, we shall not fall into such crimes nor incur such penalties: but if a person of apparently fair character, well spoken of, well thought of in the world, is carried away by temptation, and falls into the commission of some criminal act, then who can prevent the thought crossing his mind, "thank God that I have been preserved from such a fall:" and who can refrain from offering up the prayer, "Lord, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil"? Therefore it is by no means necessary for my purpose, in holding up the character of Esau as a warning, that I should attempt to underrate his good qualities; rather it strengthens my position to give to all the excellent points of his character their full force: the more admirable he appears when seen in certain lights, the more reflection ought the Apostle's words to cause.

What, then, was the defect in Esau's character? I think it may be described as a want of religious seriousness: there was (so to speak) nothing *spiritual* in him—no reverence for holy things—no

indications of a soul, which could find no sufficient joys in this world, and which aspired to those joys which are at God's right hand for evermore. You will easily see that there is nothing in the character of Esau, as I have described it, inconsistent with our supposing it to have these defects: that openness and generosity of character, which we have remarked as belonging to Esau, may easily exist, and yet the man who possesses it may be deficient in other virtues: we are not at all surprised to find that Esau, a plain rough man, who lived a wild hunting life, should have that kind of generosity which often accompanies wild life; but this may very well be, and yet there may be sad spiritual defects of character as well: the man may be sensual, have no tastes beyond his hunting and the satisfaction of his bodily appetites; he may be entirely careless about religion, the spiritual life of the soul may be to him a subject altogether unconsidered. And such I conceive to have been Esau's case: I take him to be the representative to us of the unspiritual man; the man who, whatever be his good qualities, is yet deficient in the highest of all, namely, the love of God and of holiness.

That this is the true view will, I think, at once appear, if we consider what that birthright was which Esau sold for his mess of pottage. If it

had been a mere earthly blessing, there would have been no evil in the transaction: but then also I think we may safely affirm, that Esau would not have sold it so easily; he would, I think, have borne his hunger, or have endeavoured to find some other way of appeasing it, if he had been obliged to barter for the pottage all his worldly expectations. For you will notice, that, although we read that Esau despised his birthright, yet we do not read that he despised his father's blessing. When Isaac said that he had already blessed Jacob, and had made him lord and all his brethren servants, and sustained him with corn and wine, then Esau lifted up his voice and wept; he despised his birthright, but he wept for the loss of the corn and wine. What then was this birthright? it was chiefly this, the priesthood of the family. There seems to be no doubt, that in patriarchal times the eldest-born was looked upon in somewhat of a sacred character: it has even been thought by some that "the goodly raiment of Esau," of which we read that Rebekah took it and put it upon Jacob, was no common clothing, but consisted of sacred garments which belonged to Esau in his character of priest of the family.* Moreover, the promise made to Abraham, that in his seed the earth should be

* See Blunt's *Scriptural Coincidences*, p. 12.

blessed, together with all those other revelations which made the family of Abraham expect that something great and wonderful was to arise from their posterity, would give a great religious importance to the head of the family, in whom it would be conceived that all such hopes centered. But whatever this birthright was, (and it is unnecessary for me to enter upon the discussion at any length,) this is at all events certain, that it was a *spiritual* blessing, not a blessing of corn and wine, but something which could only be valued by a mind having some spiritual discernment. And this being so, what value was Esau likely to put upon his birthright? "What good shall this birthright do me?" said Esau, when he was faint and hungry: it was not meat and drink—what good could there be in it? Here you see the want of spirituality in Esau's character: everything, you will observe, must be tried by an earthly standard; that is good which satisfies the bodily appetite, which gratifies the carnal taste; a spiritual birthright is a delusion—a mess of pottage is much better than that: give me something that will satisfy my wants now, and do not tell me of spiritual privileges; let those have them who care about them and understand them—my tastes are different and less fanciful. This is the kind of language which men of Esau's

turn of mind will use; and it seems to justify the title of *profane* which the Apostle has assigned to him. For by that name I understand the Apostle to describe the carnal, unspiritual man; the man, who, without being necessarily depraved, dishonest, unclean, blasphemous, or the like, does nevertheless take his stand upon this world as the end of his thoughts and the scene of all his activity; who considers the land as a great hunting field, as Esau considered it; who practically makes the satisfaction of his bodily wants and tastes the whole end of living; and who, thus ignoring the existence within him of a soul which can only live in God, leaves spiritual things to others, who may be foolish enough to care about them.

And this *profanity* of Esau, as it is called, is further illustrated by another circumstance. Esau, we read, married two wives of the Hittites; and we read that this was a "grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah." And again, Rebekah feared exceedingly lest Jacob in like manner should marry any of the women of the country where they were dwelling; accordingly Jacob was sent to Haran, to Laban, Rebekah's brother, and he took a wife from her family. Now there can be no doubt, but that Esau's Canaanitish marriages were in the eyes of his parents a religious offense;

he was going out of the family to whom the promises were made: and though we may not be able entirely to enter into the feelings of the patriarchs, yet unquestionably if Esau had been soberly and religiously minded he would not have acted as he did. He would often have heard, how that his grandfather Abraham had charged his servant with an oath not to allow Isaac his son to marry one of the Canaanitish women, but to go to his own kindred and take him a wife from thence. And a charge of this kind would come down to all right-minded persons with a very weighty sanction; we see, indeed, how much weight was attributed to it by Isaac and Rebekah: but Esau was not a man, with whom such views would have much influence; his fancy led him to marry a Canaanitish woman, and a Canaanitish woman he must marry; what harm was there in it? why was one race better than another? he might even deem it narrowminded and illiberal to attribute any virtue to one particular family. But the root of all was, that his taste led him in a certain direction, and he had no higher spiritual principle within him to check and control that taste. And the feeling of mind which would lead Esau to despise the religious scruples, and probably the parental commands, of Isaac and Rebekah, in the matter of his Canaanitish

marriages, is quite in keeping with that, which led him to despise his birthright.

Thus then, without unduly depreciating Esau's character, we may very easily see in what sense and with what justice the Apostle calls him profane: and now one word about his repentance, of which the Apostle also speaks as being a warning to us, because it came too late and in vain.

Esau's repentance is still consistent with his character: what is there remarkable about Esau's repentance? this—that it was manifestly of the wrong kind. "Godly sorrow," says the Apostle, "worketh repentance not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death." Esau's sorrow was of this latter kind; it was emphatically sorrow of *this world*—grief for the loss of the corn and wine: he found that after all his labour spent upon the things of this life, Jacob was still to have the richer portion: Jacob had taken his birthright; that, however, he could pardon him; but it grieved Esau to his very soul, that Jacob had gotten the promise of this world's wealth beside. Now how *can* such sorrow be availing? Esau does not repent of his profanity, does not see the mistake of his life; he continues in heart unchanged, he is only touched by the loss of what he had been expecting in the way of worldly goods: there is nothing holy in this,

nothing that is not quite consistent with the charge of being still what the Apostle calls "profane." And so Esau wept at last, and wept in vain; "Ye know how that when he would have inherited the blessing he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

And now, Christian Brethren, upon this review of Esau's character, what lesson may we draw for the improvement of our own? The leading feature of Esau's character, so far as his character was bad, was (as I have said) a want of religious seriousness; an essentially irreligious, unspiritual man; though not unjust, covetous, an extortioner, an adulterer, a liar, a thief, or a murderer, none of these, very far from them, still an ungodly man, one altogether of the earth earthy, one in whom the spiritual life was dead. And yet he was not a man living under spiritual disadvantages, not living in an atmosphere where everything savoured of the low and worldly, and where it would have required an almost supernatural effort to break the trammels by which his soul was bound, and to rise to better things: on the contrary, of all men on the face of the earth he appeared most highly favoured—the eldest son of the heir of the promises, the inheritor of the mystical birthright: and this being so, do you not see

with what force those words of the Apostle apply to a body of Christians like ourselves, "Look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest there be amongst you any profane person like Esau"? Do you not see that this is precisely the warning which professing Christians require, "*not to despise their birthright*"? Who more highly privileged than ourselves? what birth-right more glorious and noble than that of us, who have been born again of water and of the Holy Ghost? our danger is, not lest the grace of God should not be given to us, but lest we should fail of the grace of God, or fall from grace given; our danger is not lest we should be born to spiritual beggary, but lest, being born to a royal inheritance, we should despise it and barter it for a mess of pottage. And if we do fail of the grace of God, or if without actually falling away we decline in our spiritual life, the reason will probably be, that the temper of Esau's mind has infected our own; it will be no great wonder if we be so infected, because the disease has been epidemic since the fall: the disease is that of worldly tastes and wishes getting possession of the mind, and driving out spiritual thoughts. We see by daily experience how common the disease is; we find how difficult it is to persuade men to measure everything by a high standard; not to

make selfish advantage the test of every scheme, the touchstone of all excellence. And how few are there who lead a really spiritual life, of whom it can be said that "their life is hid with Christ in God"! how few who honestly make growth in holiness the only growth, in which they feel much concern! Alas, that so it should be—but so alas it is! I do not wish to paint the complexion of Christian society darker than it is; I would acknowledge with all thankfulness, that a wondrous change has come over the face of the world, since Christ was raised up in this wilderness that men might look to Him: but still that there is much of that character of mind which the Apostle calls profane, and which the character of Esau exhibited, I cannot pretend to doubt.

I would not, Christian Brethren, that any of us should despise his birthright, and one day have cause to lament that he has missed the aim of his life when no place of repentance is left. But he who in the time of health and strength does not strive to lead a holy, godly, religious life, cannot wonder if the reality of those spiritual things which he now disregards should one day break upon him with very fearful terrors. And believe me, that it will be found to be in our case as it was in Esau's; that he who despises his birthright will lose more than he thought;

the birthright and the blessing go together; he who despises the one is not worthy of the other; he who sells one for a mess of pottage will find that the other will slip through his hands. Therefore, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, let us cultivate all holy habits and all Christian tastes; let us remember whereunto we are called, that we are a holy nation, a peculiar people, and that it is our happiness as well as our duty to offer up to God all the activity of our lives and all the love of our hearts.

SERMON II.

CHARACTER OF BALAAM.

NUMBERS xxiii. 10.

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.

THE history of Balaam is involved in considerable obscurity; many questions might be raised concerning him: who he was; in what sense he was a prophet; whether he was ever inspired by the Holy Spirit on any other occasion, besides that memorable one on which he spoke before Balak; and other like questions, which it might be difficult entirely to resolve. But it will not be necessary for me, and I think it would not be useful, to lead you into any discussion upon such points; they are points worthy of discussion, but not here. If there be anything in the history of Balaam which is profitable for "doctrine and reproof and instruction in righteousness," we shall almost certainly find that valuable portion in what is patent and obvious,

and in that part of the history, which may be understood by any simple earnest-minded man.

I propose, therefore, to pass by all questions of doubt and difficulty, and endeavour to draw from such parts of Balaam's history as are clear and plain a lesson or two of great spiritual importance; and I would therefore now state to you the character, in which I desire to represent Balaam to you. I desire to point him out to you as a striking example of a man, who knew the blessedness of serving God, and was desirous of obtaining the advantages of religion without having the trouble of serving God.

I wish always to impress upon you that religion *does* impose the condition of service upon us, that it is in a very real sense and not in an imaginary one that the Lord speaks of His yoke; and that though it be true that God's service is perfect freedom, and that the yoke of Christ is the condition of our receiving that liberty of which He speaks, wherewith He sets His people free, still the yoke is a true yoke to which the neck must bend, and the service a true service which must be performed. No religion, and especially not the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, can allow men to do as they will; it is something which binds them by vows and obligations and new duties; and he who is baptized

into Christ has to maintain a constant war against the flesh and the world, and to keep the door of his lips, and guard against the overflowings of passion, and govern his temper, and exercise himself in all good works of charity and piety and devotion. And what Christ has told us is not that He has no yoke to put upon us, but that if we will take the yoke upon us we shall find it light; and so doubtless we shall; all the lives of saints and martyrs go to prove that the Lord's words are true. And Christ has told us moreover, that those who bear his yoke in this world shall wear His crown in the world to come; that godliness in this world is the seed of happiness for evermore; that those who serve are those who shall reign. But here we come upon the manner in which men are able to deceive themselves; they remember the promises of Christ, they forget or modify His conditions; they desire to reign, but they are unwilling to serve; they expect to reap an everlasting harvest, without having sown the seed. Who shall say what amount of spiritual ruin arises from this cause? The case is common, as every one will admit; nay perhaps in an age like our own, when the general truth of the doctrines of religion is admitted, it is one of the most common forms of delusion; men wish to die the death of saints,

but they are not careful to live a saintly life; they do not see the awful connexion between their lives here and their lives hereafter, and they are content with scattering some few stray seeds of faith, or with holding certain doctrines, or with being convinced by some assurance in their own hearts, or the like, instead of setting themselves earnestly to work to build up a lasting habitation upon a life spent in the service of God.

And who does not feel the unholy influences of sin and the world, tempting him more or less to walk in this foolish way? If, therefore, we can see in Balaam the example of one, who in a remarkable manner knew what was right and how he ought to walk, and how his end might be peace, and who sighed for the happiness of those who feared the Lord, and who yet in a preeminent manner sold himself to do the devil's work and ruined himself in doing it, shall we not have a picture, upon which many may look with alarm, and from which all may gather some useful warning?

Now in examining the history and character of Balaam, so far as it is necessary for our present purpose, I would have you to observe two things.

In the first place, it is plain that Balaam was a wayward and wicked man. . It may seem remarkable, that a man of such a character should

have been permitted to be in any sense a prophet of the Lord; that, however, is a point with which we are not now dealing; doubtless it is remarkable, but the fact is nevertheless plain and unquestionable, that the character of Balaam was that of a wayward and wicked man; it was not that he once committed a fault and was sorry for it; the history does not reveal to us the fall of a holy man overtaken by a sudden temptation, but reveals to us a stubborn and unholy temper as the very foundation of the prophet's character. For from the very first Balaam had received instruction concerning the Israelites and commands how to act; and when Balak's servants came to him, what had he to do, but at once to explain the commands which were upon him and send the servants back again to their master? And indeed the first time that they came Balaam did send them away; but yet I fancy there must have been something which invited their return, and probably it was the manner in which Balaam announced to them the message of God; he said, "Get you into your land, for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." Now this mode of representing God's message would, I think, seem to imply that Balaam was very willing to go but dare not; he does not tell the messengers that the people are blessed of God, and that therefore the thought of cursing

them was thoroughly horrible to his mind; his words would rather leave the impression that he was himself anxious to go, but that God would not permit him, at all events at that time. The fact is, I imagine, that Balaam had an eye to those rewards of divination which the messengers brought in their hands, and that Balak's servants perceived this, and therefore thought that a more tempting reward would probably overcome his scruples; therefore when the messengers returned without Balaam, Balak sent more and more honourable persons and more flattering promises than before. And Balaam did not seem displeased; he told the messengers indeed that he could not either bless or curse out of his own mind, but he did not send them away at once as those who were tempting him to deadly sin; he took them in and lodged them, and gave them some hopes that the command laid upon him might be relaxed, and that he might be permitted to go. And God acted towards Balaam, as He is wont to do towards those who kick against the strictness of His law; He allowed him partly to have his own way; if the men called Balaam in the morning, then He might arise and go with them: but having obtained this half permission, Balaam took his own way entirely, at least I judge from the history that he waited for no further

summons, but got up in the morning and went with the men. Observe the waywardness of the man; he must follow his own way, and that a wicked way; must "run greedily after reward;" must endeavour to obtain some of Balak's wealth, even though the cursing of God's people be the price of it. And so it was, that his way appeared perverse before God, and that the angel was sent to oppose him. And that I am not exaggerating the wickedness of his character appears from these two things; first, that when he had failed to curse Balak's enemies he taught Balak how he might ruin them by tempting them to sin, which is an almost incredible piece of wickedness on the part of one who knew all that Balaam knew concerning them; and, secondly, that (as we read afterwards*) Balaam actually died fighting against the Israelites, that is, died in fighting against those whom he had himself declared blessed. Now these two things are convincing proof that, as I said before, Balaam's sin is not that of a good man who falls and repents, but it is the outcoming of that which lay deep in his heart; his noble prophecies are not the genuine utterances of a pure and holy soul, but only the constrained and unwilling words of one who would if he could have given a prophecy of a very different kind;

* Numbers xxxi. 8.

his assumed character is that in which he magnifies the blessedness of Israel, his real character is that in which he runs greedily after reward, and seduces the people of God from holiness, and dies fighting against them.

This then is the first point, which I wish you to observe as being manifest from the history—the waywardness and wickedness of Balaam's character. And the second is this, that Balaam knew all the while that he was wrong; not one who sinned through ignorance, nor even through carelessness, but a prophet privileged in many respects to see, even beyond those of his age, into the deep things of God. He knew that he was not his own master, and that he could not curse the people, and he even told Balak's messengers that this was so; then why not there an end? it was doubtless covetousness that carried him on; but that is not what I wish to lay stress upon; what I wish to enforce is, that beyond all doubt Balaam knew that he was not walking in the path of duty. What the temptation was, how he drugged his conscience, or whether he took any pains about his conscience at all—with these points I have nothing to do just now; it is sufficient for me, that Balaam went upon his evil way with his eyes open to his wickedness: even if we were to extenuate the fault of his going with the messengers, and give

him credit for being ready to go back again when he perceived the angel in his way, yet still we have the broad facts, that after all this he deliberately took his side against the people of God, and gave most vile counsel against them, and died as their enemy. So that on the whole, I do not see how we can release Balaam from the charge of doing wickedness deliberately; sinning against light; having his heart utterly unrenewed, even while he was permitted with his lips to prophesy of the redemption of the world.

These points of Balaam's character and history lie open and manifest; and it is the consideration of them only, which is necessary to give force to the lessons that I desire to draw from the text. Bearing in mind what Balaam was, and what he afterwards did, please to notice the words of the text: he declares in the most emphatic language the blessedness of the people of God, and by consequence preaches the beauty of holiness; "how shall I curse whom God hath not cursed, and how shall I defy whom God hath not defied?"—words these, which, if taken in a sense which they may fairly bear, express as emphatically as may be the blessedness of serving God, and which might seem to be the utterance of one who thirsted "after God as the hart panteth for the waterbrooks;" and then, after declaring the future greatness of Israel

as a nation, the text concludes with those remarkable words, "Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his;" words which, without examining them particularly, certainly express this, the desire to have as the best lot which a man can have, the inheritance of the people of God. Now I do not know that ever words were uttered, which on the whole express more forcibly and almost more beautifully the aspiration of a holy man's heart, than these words of Balaam; S. Peter, or S. Paul, or S. John could have said nothing more striking and more appropriate concerning those who died as martyrs for the faith of Christ; and yet these words came from the mouth of a man, who was covetous and wayward and wicked, who knew of his wickedness and never repented of it, but continued to add sin to sin; and he who prayed that he might die like the righteous, perished in fighting against the chosen of the Lord. Were the words, then, merely those of a canting hypocrite? Not so entirely. Balaam did know, and did in a certain sense believe in, the blessedness of serving God; in fact, he had the evidence of his own tongue refusing to do its office, when he wished to curse those whom God had blessed; therefore he could not but believe, that there was a blessing belonging especially to those whom God loved; and therefore also we need not

suppose that his words were utterly hollow, when he prayed to die the righteous man's death. For who would not do so? saint or sinner—there can be no question as to which has the most light in his dwelling, when the sun of this world begins to set; give me the man, who has been the most utter despiser of all religious thoughts during the time of health, yet even he will scarcely say that there is no satisfaction in the hope full of immortality, which smooths the pillow of a dying servant of Christ. Supposing, therefore, Balaam to have meant precisely what his words seem to express, there is nothing at which we need wonder, or at all events there is nothing inconceivable: for what Balaam did was that which many others do,—he desired the peace of Christ without His yoke, and the death of the saint preceded by the life of a sinner. There is no need to suppose Balaam to have been a mere hypocrite; the experience of our own days, perhaps the examination of our own hearts, may teach us how very easy it is to look upon the service of God as that whereby we are to gain something, to treat religion as a matter of profit and loss, to have an eye to the happiness of eternity and consider how cheaply it may be won: I do not say that such views are otherwise than horrible and damnable; I do not say that our hearts, in their most thoughtful moments, can do otherwise

than shrink from such a view of our relations to God; but beyond all question this is a mode of looking upon religion, which the devil is very willing to make current in the world, and in propagating which he succeeds but too well. And, regarding Balaam's state of mind in this way, I do not see any reason for supposing that he spoke otherwise than honestly for the time, when he expressed himself in the words of the text. There were the chosen people of God abiding in their tents, enjoying the safety which God gave them, protected even from the curses of their enemies because God had declared them blessed: how could Balaam do otherwise than envy their lot? it is true that he did not envy their past hard life in the wilderness; he forgot that they had been humbled and proved; or at all events it was no part of his thought to covet for himself that strict and searching discipline, whereby God had been training the Israelitish people. No, it was the people who had passed the desert and had the promised land at length in their grasp, whose latter end the mercenary prophet desired; it was the people come to their rest, not those whose rest remained in a country very far off, whose lot was an enviable one to a man who had the mind of Balaam; and therefore I will not accuse Balaam of hypocrisy, on the other hand I will maintain

that he was quite genuine in his professions; and it is because a man of so wicked a life was capable of uttering from his heart a sentence apparently so religious and good, that I hold him to be worthy of study as a warning to ourselves.

Let me, then, now make two or three simple remarks concerning the lessons, which Balaam's case seems fitted to teach.

In the first place, Balaam teaches us the uselessness, I may say the *danger*, of conviction without repentance, or of a knowledge of what is right without an earnest pursuit of holiness. This is a lesson which we should do well to study in these days of religious knowledge; for indeed we, as Balaam did, may in a certain sense have a vision of the Almighty with our eyes open, and yet be all the while in a *trance*; we may become so familiar with the dogmas of the Christian faith, so well furnished in the head with the knowledge of all things necessary to salvation, that we may mistake our religious knowledge for religion itself. But these two things may be as far apart as the north from the south; Balaam had religious knowledge, but he had no religion; he confessed the blessedness of being under God's protection, but he was utterly determined not to serve Him; and the persuasion of his mind, that Israel was blessed, never led him to the determination of

worshipping Israel's God. Let us see to it, then, that we do not allow the mere knowledge of what is right, or even the habit of using our tongue in religious talk, to take the place of that life of God in the soul, which is based upon repentance, and nourished by prayer, and demonstrated by holiness.

And this comes nearly to the same thing as saying, that Balaam's history shews us the need of practical piety; piety while we have life and strength; sacrificing ourselves to God, body and soul, while we have something worthy of being sacrificed; curbing our desires and passions, before they die out of themselves; living a life of obedience and submission, while yet the temptation of the world is strong to follow a quite different course. What is the use of a man sighing for the death of the righteous, and a last end like that of the servants of God? the death is in general like the life, and the last end like the beginning; let a man live the righteous man's life, and then he will die the righteous man's death; let him have piety and faith and charity in his beginning, and then he will have hope in his end. God put us here to live as righteous men, and then to die as righteous men alone can. Oh, what a fearful delusion it is for men to fancy that they can live as sinners and die as saints! in one sense perhaps

they can : a man who has lived carelessly does not necessarily go through those awful scenes, which sometimes surround a sinner's last hours ; he may in his weakness be soothed by gentle words, and the promises of the Gospel may be seized upon for comfort when perhaps they cannot rightly be so used, and so the man may die in apparent peace, and even with great confidence in his acceptance with God ; but after all, the comforts of the dying bed in this world are no measure of the real nature of the man's spiritual condition ; the last day alone will reveal who have died the death of righteous men, and who they are whose last end is to be envied ; but what I wish to press is, that it is the life to which we are to look, and then that we may safely leave the end to be such as God wills ; whatever may be the appearance, the end will be almost certainly such as has been the life ; the seed will spring up, the harvest will be as we have sown. And a far wiser prayer than Balaam's would be this : " Give me grace to lead the life of the righteous, and let all the prime of my health and faculties be consecrated to Thee, O Lord."

Lastly, the death of Balaam shews us in a very striking manner the uselessness of such religious aspirations as that in which he indulged. Balaam's worst sins were committed after he had uttered the pious prayer of the text, and his end was miserable.

Oh, my Christian Brethren, beware lest any of you be in like manner tempted to evil! you may see the excellence of religion; you may be even led to utter high aspirations for the rest, which remains for the people of God; but it is only a diligent walking in God's ways, a constant battle against self and sin and impurity and worldly lusts and the like, a constant serving of God in all things which He Himself has commanded, which can ensure you against making shipwreck of your faith.

Balaam's history has been recorded for us as an example; and this is the lesson which I think should be written upon his grave:

Take warning, all ye who pass by, from the miserable end of one, who wished to die the righteous man's death, but was unwilling to live the righteous man's life!

SERMON III.

AHAB'S IVORY HOUSE.

1 KINGS xxii. 37, 38, 39.

So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria.

And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the Lord which He spake.

Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

“*So the king died*”—and a very miserable death it was. A miserable death, because he died in rebellion against God; and his very last act before his death had been to punish unjustly the prophet of the Lord, because he had told him the truth.

However, most men die as they have lived; and when a man has “sold himself to work wickedness,” and has devoted all the prime of his life to the pursuit of sinful objects, you are not likely in his death to find much peace and satisfaction.

But I am not going to enter at length into the sinful course of Ahab's life, nor the circumstances of his death: I am intending to found my remarks upon a few words in the text, which may probably have escaped your notice, or upon which at all events you may not have laid much stress when you heard them. From the text it appears, that there was once another history of Ahab's life, besides that which we have in the first book of Kings: the text refers to a book called the *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*, as containing the *rest* of the acts of Ahab. That book has, I suppose, now perished: probably it was of much inferior value to the books which remain to us, as being devoted especially to the history of kings, who were professedly in a state of schism from the Church of God; and this alone would be sufficient reason why such a book should form no part of the Old Testament, for the Old Testament is the history of God's *Church*, and therefore only deals with the history of the house of Israel, or of foreign countries, so far as they bear on the history of the Jewish Church. The history of Ahab, therefore, is professedly imperfect; it is given to us, so far as it is bound up with the history of Judah and the history of religion. But there was much that he did besides that which we now find recorded; and all this had apparently

a place in the lost book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Now, I wish to speak to you about the difference between the history of the life of Ahab, as it has been preserved for us in the Book of Kings, and the history of it as we may suppose it to have existed in this lost book. Taking Ahab as we find him in the Old Testament, his character seems throughout to be in keeping with that awful description of him, that he was one who had "sold himself to work wickedness;" his life seems instinct with but one spirit, that of wilfulness and rebellion; there is scarcely one redeeming feature: the most favourable point in his life was the manner in which he put his faith in the Lord when threatened by Benhadad, as you may read in 1 Kings xx.; and yet in this we may find matter for his condemnation, for when we read that, in his fear of Benhadad, he was willing patiently to consult the prophet of the Lord, and when his faith was rewarded with success, how can we think that his subsequent ungodliness and rebellion was otherwise than extremely aggravated? And that other redeeming feature of his life, as it would seem, his penitence and ambition when threatened by Elijah after the murder of Naboth,* what is that better than a

* 1 Kings xxi. 27.

condemnation, when we think that Ahab could be humbled for a few days by the fear of threatened vengeance, and yet never permanently repent and seek the Lord against whom he had sinned? And if you put out of the question these two passages, which after all do not seem much to his praise when sifted to the bottom, you can, as I have said, scarcely find a redeeming feature in Ahab's life; and we have it on the testimony of the sacred historian, that there was none like Ahab in the extremity of his wickedness, none so daring in rebellion, none so thoroughpaced in sin.

Yet I suspect, that if we had possessed the lost Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, or if we had a life of Ahab drawn by some uninspired and not very experienced hand, we might have had a very different picture given to us. The text speaks of that other book containing an account of "all the *rest* of Ahab's acts, and the ivory house which he made, and the cities which he built." And these glimpses of Ahab's life reveal him to us in a quite different character from that, which appears on the face of the Bible history; he would seem to have been one who encouraged arts and industry, one who did a good deal for the temporal improvement of his people, and one concerning whom a flattering historian might have said many things, which would tend to raise our thoughts of

him as a useful king. You can easily fancy the figure, which the ivory palace and the newly-erected cities would form in the narrative of some human historian, and how much would be said about the adorning of the capital, the strengthening of the kingdom, the growth of wealth and commerce; but one verse of the sacred history is sufficient to include all that it was necessary to say on this head, and that which really forms the staple of the life of Ahab is his spirit of ungodliness and rebellion. And we may see an awful commentary on such lives in that which has happened in the case of Ahab: his ivory palace and the cities which he built have passed away, together with that book of Chronicles which contained their history; they are gone by and have vanished like a dream; but what has remained, and will remain for evermore, is the fearful testimony, that neither before nor since was there ever any king in Israel like Ahab, who gave himself up so completely and unreservedly to work evil in the sight of the Lord. We may see a commentary upon this truth, that the question of lasting importance to each man is no other than this, whether he has set himself with all his heart to serve the Lord, or whether he has determined to be rebellious; and that lasting praise belongs, not to him who builds cities and ivory palaces,

but to him who fears the Lord and walks in His ways.

Now all this is part and parcel of a great and general truth, namely, that God and man look upon many things in very different lights—"man looks to the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart." And seeing that each one of us, even the lowliest, has a personal history, upon the view taken of which by the great Judge of quick and dead the most mighty consequences depend,—seeing that it is of small avail to each of us to have a history or a character which men may deem praiseworthy, unless the same receive praise from the Lord Himself,—I have thought it worth while to take occasion from the example of Ahab to point out to you, how that it is possible for a character, when painted by a human hand, to appear even amongst the great ones of the earth, and when painted by the Spirit of God to appear utterly abominable. And this lesson seems to me so useful, so full of warning as to the need we have of depth and earnestness in our religious life, that I shall endeavour to impress it upon you, and illustrate it for you by several instances.

The first I will mention shall be that of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, under whom the children of Israel were in the first place so cruelly tasked, and afterwards delivered from bondage. Now we

have our principal knowledge of this king and his character from the book of Exodus; and the opinion that must be formed from the reading of that book is certainly this, that Pharaoh was one who had more opportunities than usual of knowing the Lord, and more reasons than usual for fearing Him; and that notwithstanding his advantages, he neither knew God nor feared him. Pharaoh stands out to us from our earliest childhood as the type of hardness of heart, and stubbornness of rebellion: if you want an example of a man who rejected warning and despised reproof, of a man in whom the hardening power of sin shewed itself in all the awfulness of its consequences, of a man openly setting at defiance the God of heaven, any child would give you the name of Pharaoh; and you would feel inclined to rank him amongst the most deplorable of those, with whose character we become in Holy Scripture familiar. And yet I suspect, that if we had a life of this Pharaoh written by a different hand, our impression might be very different; if "the rest of his acts" were written for us in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Egypt, I suspect that we should find that those qualities, which bring him before us in the book of Exodus as a man peculiarly wicked, might easily be rendered less prominent by the history of his greatness in other respects. Why

do I say this? because the discoveries of late years have brought to light exactly that which I have been speaking of, namely, a Chronicle of the kings of Egypt, and we are to a considerable extent acquainted with the history and character of many of the kings of very early times. Now it of course was a very natural question for those who were studying these ancient records to ask, under which of these kings was it, that the children of Israel were oppressed, and delivered by Moses?*

The question has been asked, and learned men have satisfied themselves as to which of the kings it was, to whom the history of the Exodus belongs: and what was his character? what impression should we form of him from the Egyptian Chronicle? does he appear there as the same ungodly, rebellious man, that we see him in the Bible history? No: he appears to us as a prince of very resolute and despotic character; one of whom all the conduct attributed to him in the book of Exodus is very credible, but one of whom we should certainly form an altogether different notion from that, of which I have spoken as the one so familiar to ourselves. He was what ordinary history would call a great prince; he raised great armies, he made great wars, built great

* See Wilkinson's *Ancient Egyptians*, vol. i. p. 54, (First Series).

cities, made his name feared, increased the power of his country; and so far was he from being affected and changed by what he had seen in the case of the Israelites, that he would seem (if we may trust the dates) to have survived the overthrow of his army in the Red Sea, and to have raised new armies and carried on his plans of war and conquest exactly as he had done before. And thus the obstinate oppressor of the children of Israel, the man who alternately trembled before Moses and hardened himself in his wickedness, the man whose name finds a place in sacred history merely because he was "a persecutor of the Church and injurious," was celebrated in his country in his own and in aftertimes as a mighty prince; one illustrious in the long line of kings; one who built palaces and cities, and whose good and glorious deeds were celebrated in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Egypt.

Again: I will illustrate the difference between human chroniclers and the writers of Sacred history, by an instance taken from the New Testament. It is the history of the death of Herod, as recorded in Acts xii. Now first imagine that history written by an ordinary human hand, as in fact we have it written for us by a Jewish historian. It was a day of great pomp and public ceremony, when Herod was going to appear be-

fore the people of Tyre and Sidon, and to make a speech before them: no doubt everything was done to give effect to the scene; Herod was dressed in his royal apparel, it was a set day, everything arranged beforehand, a gorgeous pageant, multitudes of high officers and soldiers in their splendid uniforms surrounding the great king; the people were anxious to flatter and please Herod, and so they applauded his speech in unmeasured terms; they shouted and declared in their profane flattery, that it could be no human voice, that it was a god who was speaking to them. Alas, Herod must have known well that it was no god who was speaking! he was a bloody and tyrannical man, one whom the multitude flattered, not because they loved, but because they feared him; and yet he delighted in the flattery, and looked upon himself as one who deserved his greatness, not as one whom God had exalted in order that he might set forth His praise. However, the merely human historian would know nothing of all this; he would only see the gorgeous outside of the assembly, and hear the flattering shouts of the multitude; and then he would go on to tell you that this was the last scene of Herod's life, that a complaint which perhaps had previously been gaining ground upon the king was just now brought to a crisis, that he left the

assembly in great pain, and soon after expired in extreme agony. Now I do not think that this would be at all an unfair account of the history; I think that we cannot find fault with human historians because they give to all things a human complexion, and do not reveal to us all the hidden and divine springs by which events are brought about. But now compare the history given in the manner I have supposed, with the actual account as recorded by S. Luke.* “Upon a set day,” we read, “Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne and made an oration to them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost.” So then it was the angel of the Lord! there was another in that gorgeous assembly, beside those whom human eye could see; the angel of the Lord was there with sword drawn in his hand: and when Herod, his hands yet bloody with the murder of S. James and the jailors of S. Peter, allowed himself to be counted for a god, then the measure of his pride was full, and the angel smote him. Christian Brethren, if we had our eyes quite purged from human films and obscurations, do not you

* Acts xii. 21, 22, 23.

think that we might often, in what we call accident, or ordinary sickness, or curious coincidence, recognize the hand of the angel of the Lord? He died of a severe internal complaint—so might say the human history:* “the angel of the Lord smote him,”—so saith the Scripture.

In a very different way from either of the instances which I have already quoted, but still in a very useful way, we may find an illustration of the difference between divine and human history in the account of Josiah's death, 2 Kings xxiii. Josiah's youth had been spent in a great work of reformation; his reign had been one of singular blessing to the Jewish kingdom; and his death was what we should call very untimely: the king of Egypt makes an expedition against the king of Assyria; Josiah has apparently no reason for taking any part in the quarrel; however he does take a part, and is immediately slain without producing any result either way: he, whose life had been so useful and honourable, dies a most inglorious death. Can you not fancy the manner, in which a human historian would on such an occasion bring out of his store the choicest la-

* I am speaking here of what might be said, rather than of what Josephus actually has said; for he does seem to recognize a divine visitation for impiety, which in a writer whose mind was formed upon the study of the Old Testament Scriptures is not surprising.

mentations over blighted prospects, and fair beginnings checked by unfortunate circumstances, together with reflections and wonderings concerning the strangeness of human destinies? But the sacred history merely tells us that Josiah was killed at Megiddo, and carried to Jerusalem to be buried. Why is so little said about this death? because apparently Josiah's work was done; he had commenced a reformation and had completed it, and the interest of Josiah's history consisted in what he did for the honour of God, not in any of the circumstances of his death. And indeed, if a man's virtues are not known until men read them upon his sepulchre, one is inclined to suspect that they were but sorry virtues after all; and if a man have but devoted his youth and all his energies to the honour of God, he may very well be content with as simple an epitaph as that which the sacred writer has given to Josiah. Here then again we see by an example, how that in sacred history the guiding principle is this, to record chiefly, not those things which tend most to shew the greatness of a man, the cities or the ivory houses that he built, but rather those acts which have tended specially either to the honour or dishonour of God; those acts which have had the most immediate bearing upon the progress of true religion and the good of His Church.

These are the acts which after all are the most important in their consequences, either for good or evil; these are the acts which will yet be living in their results, when cities and ivory palaces have decayed and passed away.

Ah! Christian Brethren, how differently would many persons and acts be judged, if we estimated them upon the principles of holy Scripture! Suppose, for instance, a man to arise of intellect and courage and penetration superior to his fellows, and suppose this man to take advantage of his felt and acknowledged superiority to raise himself up above his brethren, and to lay the foundation of a universal sovereignty; and suppose that in carrying out his views he has but one principle, namely, the exaltation of himself, and that he suffers no laws divine or human to stand in the way of his plans; and suppose that in furtherance of his schemes he deluges whole countries in blood, and that the peace and happiness of nations is manifestly a trifle unworthy of all consideration in comparison with the great end of still raising himself higher and higher; then ought such a man to be praised? According to all deep sterling religious principles, surely not; and yet I think that the last generation saw a man whose life was as unprincipled as I have described, and whose brilliant and wonderful acts nevertheless

so blinded the minds of many, that they hardly considered how entirely that man's whole life was opposed to all principles of godliness and honesty. Thus it is, that we fall into the habit of weighing actions by other balances than that of God's sanctuary; we allow the brilliancy of a man's deeds to light up the darkness of his principles; we allow a man to expunge from his list of household words *duty, obedience, submission, humility*, and to put the empty name of *glory* in their place; and though the glory be only the glory of self, still, if it be pursued with genius and success, we allow ourselves to admire and applaud. Very differently will the lives of men seem to be, when all things are made new, and the Son of Man sits upon His throne, and all men have to be tried before Him. "Give an account of thy stewardship! thou who hast had power and wealth and talent and time; what hast thou done? what use hast thou made of thy gifts?" How will it serve an Ahab to make to the question a reply such as this, "I have done many deeds which the people applauded; I built many cities, and I made an ivory palace!" Alas! these things may look well on the page of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel, but they will find no record in the Book of Life. And indeed, Christian Brethren, many an act which has been praised and noised about in

human chronicles is like the ivory house and the cities of this unhappy king of Israel: a traveller may walk through the land of Israel and he will see no vestige of Ahab's greatness; his cities have long since been depopulated, his palace has passed away; but that testimony has *not* passed away, it is written in God's book for evermore, it has come down even to us as a lesson and a warning in these latter days, that Ahab was one who sold himself to work wickedness before the Lord beyond all other kings of Israel.

Wherefore let us lay this well to heart, that we too may possibly be walking in a vain show; we may possibly be judging of ourselves, and may be judged by others, differently from the judgment of God. I would that we could all feel more deeply the awfulness and solemnity of our present lives; we have a work to do in this life which requires all our care; we have "to work out our salvation with fear and trembling;" we have to build a tower upon that foundation-stone which Christ has laid in Zion, the top of which shall reach to heaven, to save us when the flood of God's wrath comes: other things we may have to do, and doubtless must do, but are we doing this? do we feel that this is our work? do we look upon our life in the flesh as seriously as we ought, considering what great issues depend upon

it? No, no—we do not; we cannot all declare that we are thus walking solemnly before God: I do not wish to judge, but I am sure that in every congregation there must be some who are conscious that the affairs of this present world have too great a share of their love, and that they are not sufficiently anxious for growth in grace and in the knowledge of God their Saviour. What can I say to you better than this, what words can I desire to print deeply in all hearts more than such words as these? “the fashion of this world passeth away;” its cities, its ivory houses, aye, and its cottages too, its domestic comforts, its luxuries, its strifes, its wants, its wishes; “the fashion of this world passeth away;” but “he that doeth the will of the Lord” humbly, patiently, earnestly, he through the grace of God “abideth for ever!”

SERMON IV.

MANKIND PUNISHED BY BEING LEFT TO
THEMSELVES.

PSALM lxxxii. 12, 13.

My people would not hear My voice, and Israel would not obey Me.

So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations.

THE lesson which I propose to draw from these words is most important; one which lies at the root of all the relations which subsist between our souls and God, one also which I think rises very obviously from the text, and which yet I venture to guess the words have never suggested to the minds of many amongst you. It seems to me very possible that you may have read the words of the text and heard them read often, and may have taken them to mean merely this, that God withdrew His blessing from the Israelites because they rebelled against Him; and you may

have concluded, that in like manner He will now as of old withhold His mercies from those who will not heartily serve Him. And I do not say that these conclusions are wrong; they are true conclusions, true as regards the Israelites, true as regards ourselves; but they do not convey, as I think, the peculiar point and edge of the text.

For what says the text? "My people would not hear My voice, and Israel would not obey Me." Here was the act of rebellion, the determination not to serve and obey God; and it was a determination which was sure to bring down evil on their heads; and so it did: but mark what kind of evil, mark what was the sentence of God upon a chosen people who had made up their minds to disobey: "So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations." A strange punishment this truly! strange at least to a mind not looking below the surface of things; Israel wishes to have his own way instead of God's way, wishes to follow his own imaginations instead of God's law, and the punishment is this, that, instead of correcting the rebellious spirit by sharp chastisement and discipline, God suffers His rebellious servants to have their own way.

And it is clear from the tone of the Psalm, that this punishment is looked upon as one of the

most grievous which God's wrath can inflict; for the writer of the Psalm, speaking as in the words of God, laments over the people as over those who were now past recovery; as though the sword of the enemy, the famine, the pestilence, were but slight scourges, compared with that more bitter curse of being allowed to do as they would without check or curb.

This must needs seem strange to one who judges after the manner which is common in this world. For to be free from check, to do as he will, to be permitted to have his heart's lust or desire, to be able without let or hindrance to follow his own imagination,—this is what half the world are seeking after, this to half the world would be almost the definition of happiness. It is the restraint of rules and laws which many men find so galling; the laws of society forbid this, and the bonds of family interfere with that, and the Bible is severe in its code, and the Church protests, and withal conscience is for ever tormenting and vexing; and so a man who desires to walk after the ways of his own heart finds himself perpetually curbed and harassed by all kinds of restrictions; and nothing would delight him more than to receive such a sentence as this, “From henceforth you *shall* have your own heart's lusts, and you *shall* be allowed to follow your own imaginations.”

And yet this boon of freedom would be the deadliest curse; this coveted state of liberty is the last awful punishment reserved for those, who have made up their minds to rebel, and whom the ordinary chastisements and warnings of God have failed to bring to repentance.

Now let us look into this subject a little more closely. The Psalm from which the text is taken throughout belongs to Israel; it is a hymn of merryhearted joy to the God of Jacob, for all His mercy and goodness. Let us then for a moment consider the relation of Israel to their God: Israel was the chosen people, they were taken out of all the world as a witness for the true God, they were to be treated with special favour, they were to be the holiest as well as the happiest of mankind. How did God shew His love to them? Did He say, Your natural appetites lead you to such and such things, and as you are My chosen people I will not interfere to thwart your propensities? Did He say, Restraints are hard to human nature to bear, and therefore I will free you from restraints, and you shall do as you please? Surely He did the very opposite of all this: God shewed His love to the Israelites by giving them a law more strict than any which had gone before it: He revealed Himself as a jealous God who would be obeyed: He

shewed that they were His chosen people by laying upon them a most complex system of ordinances and sacrifices and ceremonies: He curbed all their actions, and He punished them severely for all transgressions of His law. Thus the marks of His favour must have formed, to those who loved Him not, the most heavy galling bondage: and it was only as a last step, when the people were determined to rebel, that He granted to them that prime blessing, as a worldly mind would consider it, namely, license to follow their own hearts' lusts, and to do according to their own imaginations. A strange method of shewing favour, if the judgment of many in these as in all other days is to be taken as the standard of happiness! If freedom to follow our own ways were the great boon to be sought by mankind, then the wild children of Esau, and not the tribes of Israel, were the people really blest by God; for they wandered after their own lusts and did according to their own imaginations, while the Israelites were checked at every turn by some law or restriction or ordinance. In truth we can only understand this mode of shewing love and favour, by supposing that that character of God is true which we recite in the Collect, that "His service is perfect freedom;" or by reflecting on that prayer, which we ourselves offer up for the

people of God, "Govern them and lift them up for ever." And this is a prayer which a wise Israelite would have put up for the Jewish Church, even as we put it up for the Christian; he would not, he dared not, have prayed, "Give us our own desires, give us leave to follow our imaginations, and so exalt us, so lift us up for ever:" he would have seen that such a prayer would have been a devil's prayer, and not one dictated by the Holy Spirit of God; he would have felt from his inmost soul, that to be allowed to follow his own wishes would be precisely to sink him below the dignity of his position as a chosen servant of God, instead of lifting him up; and therefore he would pray, "Oh, leave us not to our own ways, but do Thou rule over us, do Thou restrain us, do Thou govern us, for so only can we be lifted up above ourselves and made to be at one with Thee."

But Israel did not always see that their blessedness in being the people of God consisted in their being governed. Quite the opposite was their character; and they were continually exhibiting this character. What was it that made it a sin in them to desire a king? They saw that other nations had kings over them, and they did not estimate their own blessedness in being governed by God; and so it was that to desire a king was

to kick at God's government, and therefore a sin. You will remember Samuel's words on the occasion, "Ye said unto me, A king shall reign over us, *when the Lord your God was your king;*"* and again, "Your wickedness is great which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king." And how did God punish them for this sin? just in the way described in the text, *by allowing them to have that which they desired;* it was better for them to be without a king, but they would not listen to reason, and said, "Nay, but we will have a king;" and the punishment of their sin was this, that God gave them their own way. It was no mark of favour then, that granting a king when the people desired it, but quite otherwise: and so the prophet Hosea tells us, in those words, "I gave thee a king in Mine anger."† The prophet represents the Almighty as reasoning with Israel for his rebellion, and saying, "Oh Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help:" and how would God give him help? you will see from the next verse, "*I will be thy king:* where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges, of whom thou saidst, give me a king and princes:" and then follow the words which I quoted just now, "I gave thee a king in Mine anger." So that

* 1 Samuel xii.

† Hosea xiii.

redemption from the misery and degradation into which Israel had fallen, was to be found in turning to God, and being governed by Him, and ceasing to walk after their own lusts and to follow their own imaginations.

And as I have quoted the prophet Hosea, let me call your attention to another passage in his book, which seems to bear very forcibly on this present subject. You will find it in the fourth chapter, in which the prophet complains of the idolatry of the people of Israel, of their asking advice of stocks and stones; and what is the punishment? is it death, is it banishment, is it famine, or pestilence, or war? no, something worse than all these; "Ephraim," says the prophet, "is joined to idols; *let him alone*:" as though the permission to do as he pleased were the last and bitterest vial of the wrath of God.

But now, leaving the case of the Israelitish people which suggested the words of the text, and which in this as in so many other instances is full of instruction for ourselves, let us come to the application to our own case of the principle of God's government, which I have been endeavouring to bring out for you. God's principles of government are ever the same; He changes not: and if it was only in being governed by Him, in wearing his yoke, in carrying his burdens, that

the people of Israel could escape bondage and be lifted up and be noble and free, then beyond doubt the same is true of ourselves, and we too shall be slaves as long as we are free, and shall only be free when we become in heart and soul the servants of God. This may seem a contradiction; but it is the very purpose which I have in view, to shew you that it is no contradiction, but a most solemn and necessary truth. Just consider our blessed Lord's view of liberty and bondage: He promised certain of the Jews, that if they would be His disciples they should know the truth, and the truth should make them free: they were insulted by the offer; as the children of Abraham they thought themselves God's freemen already, and how then should Christ make them free? But Christ pointed their eyes to some fetters which they had not seen, and which shewed that they were bond-slaves; "whosoever committeth sin," said Christ, "is the slave of sin:" Christ perceived that they who talked of their freedom had pride in their hearts, and were coated with hypocrisy, and were full of malice, and did not love God; and therefore He told them that they were slaves of sin. But He offered them liberty by becoming His disciples: and what does He say to such? "Take *My yoke* upon you;" and again, "If ye love Me keep *My commandments*." So that

the yoke of sin is to be displaced from the necks of those who enter Christ's service, not that those necks may be free from a yoke, but that they may bear His. Indeed, Christian Brethren, man was never made to be free: to be permitted to follow his own imaginations is to be permitted to plunge headlong into the most utter bondage: see how heathens, for want of a clear definite law, bearing marks of coming from God, make gods for themselves, gods to whom, however unworthy of their homage, they may bow their knees, and so satisfy the craving of their hearts for some rules to obey. Men do not always see this; they think that freedom from law is happiness, and the fetters of rules an intolerable drawback on their happiness; and yet, if the principle which I am insisting upon be true, it is the very mark of God's special favour that He does give rules, and make restrictions, and put a yoke upon the neck of those whom He loves. And the strange thing is, that men are to be found who profess to find happiness in this yoke, who do not envy those who profess utter freedom, who think the service of God to be indeed the only true happiness. This is the belief of every religious man; it must be, if he thinks those words to be true, that "godliness has the promise of this world as well as of that which is to come."

Yet who can wonder, that seeing the tendencies of man's heart the religious men should be in the minority; and that the majority should hold, that to be able to indulge their own lusts and follow their own imaginations is the very perfection of human happiness? For consider what kind of yoke the earnest service of God, and the thorough determination to imitate the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, lays upon a man. Let us not pretend that we are not bound by a law, however pleasant it may have become to us through the Holy Spirit's help to obey that law; and if a man, careless concerning the spiritual life of his soul, give as a reason for his neglect of religion, that it would fetter him and put a bondage upon him, let us give him the full benefit of the cavil; let us acknowledge that beyond doubt we *are* under a law, which binds our conduct and restricts our actions. Let me draw a comparison between the condition of a man wearing the yoke of Christ, and that of a man who is free from that yoke. Now the man who wears Christ's yoke feels that he must keep a watch over his life and over his thoughts: he knows what S. James says of the difficulty of bridling the tongue, and what our Lord has said concerning idle words; and therefore he looks upon his tongue with suspicion, and checks it when it is hasty, and refrains it when it is dis-

posed to say anything which is contrary to the rules of purity, honesty, or charity. He is particular in the choice of his company, because he knows that "evil communications corrupt good manners"; he is sure that there is great danger in standing in the way of the wicked or listening to the words of those who do not fear God; he thinks it right to avoid the society of those, who are idle and careless about the more important concerns of their lives; especially if he is a young man, he remembers those words of Solomon concerning the destruction of him who is a "companion of fools." And again, he does not think it right to use the Lord's day as his own day; he believes that that day is consecrated to God, and therefore he does not think it dutiful to make it as other days: I am not laying down what is and what is not to be done on that day, I am content to leave that to your own consciences, I am only saying that the Lord's day is felt by each earnest man to be a *tie* upon him, a day when his duty to God restricts him in a manner in which upon other days it does not. Then again, a man who serves God thinks it right to put a curb upon his appetite; he fears being made a slave by luxury; fears lest he should make his belly his god; and so he curbs himself, he does not indulge in everything which his flesh

desires; he knows that meat and drink may become, and do become to many, among the chief of spiritual enemies. And if in this and other ways he curbs the lust of the flesh, he remembers also that there is equally a lust of the eye; that the Scripture speaks of "making a covenant with the eye"; and that our Lord speaks of adultery at heart being committed by wanton looks; and therefore he regards the eye, if not watched and checked, as an inlet for Satan's temptations, and he curbs it, and says it shall not be free to do as it will. Then again, the true servant of God thinks it right to be particular about his devotions and his attendance on ordinances; he does not think that he may pray if he pleases, go to Church if he pleases, come to the Holy Communion if he pleases; no, he regards himself as tied down by strict positive rules, which he is bound to obey and has no right to set at nought; and therefore he is strict and particular about these duties, he does not feel himself free, he acknowledges that he is not free; he wears a *yoke*; he does not deny it. And so we might go through all his duties and relations, and we should find the same character throughout. But I have said enough; any man, who does not wear the yoke himself, will think what I have said already sufficient to shew a life of piety to be a life of misery; "See,"

such a man may say, "how free am I! I think as I please, I speak as I please, I eat and drink as I please, I go to church or not as I please, I pray when I please, I bring up my children as I please, I look where I please—no covenant with the eye for me—I associate with whom I please, I spend my Sundays as I please, in fact I live as I please altogether; did not God make us to enjoy ourselves? does He not wish us to be happy? and how can I be happy, if I am thwarted in all my wishes and restrained in all my appetites?"

Indeed, Brethren, God does wish us to be happy; and it is just because there is no true happiness except in serving Him, that He sent His Son into the world, in order that having been made free by Him we may be free indeed. Free! how can a man who follows his appetites call himself free? how can a man be free who cannot command himself? what signifies it by what name you call it? if a man under the notion of being free follows his own lusts more and more, until at last he cannot help following them whether he will or no, how does that man differ from a slave? how does he do anything but confirm those words of our Lord, that he who committeth sin is the servant of sin? No, Brethren, a man may kick against God's service and think it hard and strive

to have his own way, but God in mercy restrains him; He speaks to him by conscience, by His ministers, by His providence, it may be by sickness, by adversity and affliction; and while the man is struggling with His convictions and writhing under God's hand, there is still hope; just as while the patient shrinks under the knife, there is evidence of vitality still remaining; but when a man has become hardened in his sin, and has stifled his convictions, and soiled every thread of his baptismal garment, and wiped out (if it may be) that cross which was marked in his forehead, then he thinks himself free from all restraint, and oh! fearful delusion of the devil! he is only free, because he has experienced the most deadly sentence of God's wrath, and God has "given him up unto his own heart's lust and let him follow his own imaginations."

Is there really any slavery in serving Him whose "service is perfect freedom"? surely we *must* serve Him, surely we shall be miserable if we do not, and surely also to those who have been accustomed to serve sin His service will be irksome and intolerable. But, Christian Brethren, God designs by His whole course of education to make us different from what we are by nature; He desires to transform us by His Spirit, to make us meet for the inheritance which He has prepared

for us, to raise our minds more and more to see the surpassing excellence of those joys which communion with Him affords. Therefore I would say, in conclusion, let us claim our privileges as Christians; let us think of ourselves as baptized into Christ precisely for this, that we may be His soldiers and servants, and so free from sin, free from the world, free from ourselves. Let us strive ever to live by rule, to keep a watch upon our lusts, our appetites, our words, our thoughts; let us endeavour to realize the horrors of being allowed to do as we please; let us seek nearer communion with Him who is our life, in prayer and sacraments and in doing good; and let us ever pray, with the earnestness of men who feel the awfulness of being without God in the world, "Oh Lord! never leave us to our own hearts' lusts and to our own imaginations, but of Thy mercy govern us in this world, and so lift us up for ever!"

SERMON V.

IT IS MINE OWN INFIRMITY.

PSALM lxxvii. vv. 7, 8, 9, 10.

Will the Lord absent Himself for ever? and will he be no more entreated?

Is His mercy clean gone for ever? and is His promise come utterly to an end for evermore?

Hath God forgotten to be gracious? and will He shut up His lovingkindness in displeasure?

And I said, It is mine own infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most Highest.

IT is evident that the Psalm, from which these words are taken, was written under the pressure of very great trouble. David had, as we know, seen much affliction, and under God this was the means of producing that wonderful spirituality and ripeness of mind which we observe in the Book of Psalms. In the Psalm before us I do not feel quite sure whether the trouble was of a public or of a private kind; I think the latter, though at the same time the manner in which God's national

mercies to the Jews are referred to at the conclusion might lead us to think, that throughout the whole the writer is speaking the language of the nation, is himself the mouthpiece of the feelings of the people. Either way the moral to be drawn from the Psalm for our own edification is the same; for what I wish you to see is, that in all troubles and adversities it is our own fault if we have not a light to guide and cheer us, and that the true remedy against despondency is to look back upon the love of God pledged to us, and His mercies shewn to us in former days.

This lesson will come out more clearly and forcibly as we proceed: at present let us examine the text and the verses connected with it. You will observe that the Psalmist, when he wrote the Psalm, was not actually in trouble, but had just escaped from it; he says in the first verse, according to the Bible version, "I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and He gave ear unto me." And though the Prayer-book puts this in the future, "I *will* cry unto God with my voice," I think there can be no doubt that the other is the true meaning; for this Psalm is not the outpouring of a disconsolate unhappy mind, but of one that has found the true way to peace, and then raises a trophy of deliverance and a guide for others who may be in like manner

oppressed. The Psalm then may be taken as the expression of feeling of one, who has been in great trouble and has found the means of escape; and without entering into any discussion as to what the trouble was, it will be evident from the language of the Psalm that it was very severe; it might have been the affliction of grievous bodily sickness, it might have been some painful bereavement, or it might have been some great worldly loss, or some great danger, or some grievous spiritual temptation; it matters not what, it must have been something very heavy which could make the Psalmist record it so solemnly as he does in this Psalm of thanksgiving. And what was his remedy? he looked back upon old times, when the face of the Lord shone upon him; he lived in the cheerful past, so to speak, instead of in the cheerless present; and so, though no light shone upon his path at present, he was blest with the reflected light of former and more prosperous days. It is clear from the tenor of the Psalm, that he had been disposed at first to give way to despondency; he thought that because adversity was heavy upon him just now, it would always be so, and that (in his own language) "God had forgotten to be gracious;" he felt inclined to murmur and to complain of the want of God's love; but when he cast the whole thing in his mind

calmly and in retirement, he was soon led to take a different view; when he communed with his own heart in the night, and examined himself and took an unprejudiced survey, such as a man is most likely to take when he kneels down in his chamber and shuts the door and communes with his Father who seeth in secret, then it was that his thoughts took that sober turn which he has represented in the text: "Will the Lord absent Himself for ever; and will He be no more entreated? Is His mercy clean gone for ever; and is His promise come utterly to an end for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious; and will He shut up His lovingkindness in displeasure? And I said, It is mine own infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most Highest!"

Now this is a very remarkable conclusion. You will observe, that so soon as he plainly looks his desponding thoughts in the face, he sees their absurdity; and he sees too, that all his painful feelings have arisen, not from the absence of God's protecting care, but from his own weakness and foolishness: "I said it is *mine own* infirmity." And just observe what a sound and safe line of argument this would be in David's case: you will remember how he made use of it himself before Saul; Saul told him it was utterly hopeless and

mad for him to think of fighting the Philistine; but David's mind at once recurred to the marks which he had already received of God's favour, and which he considered as an earnest of future blessing; he told Saul how that when he kept his father's sheep there came a lion and a bear, and that he had slain them both, and he argued that He who had enabled him to do this would protect him in this his present danger. And in like manner afterwards, when he was unjustly persecuted by Saul, and was in continual fear of his life, he could look back to the preservation which God had vouchsafed to him in his combat with the giant, and believe that the same arm would guard him; he could say, and he was bound to say, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most Highest;" that is, I will look back to those days in which I am conscious of having received signal blessings from the Almighty's hand, and I will believe that He will protect me still. And if contrary thoughts should rise in his mind, and despondency should be beginning to prevail, he was bound to suppress it with those words which in his calmest moments he most felt to be true, "It is not that God hath forgotten to be gracious, but it is *mine own* infirmity."

And if the Psalmist allowed his mind a range wider than his own personal experience, and con-

sidered the past evidences of the presence of God with his Church, the conclusion would be the same. Indeed, from the manner in which in the latter part of the Psalm David expands this view of the subject, it would seem that it presented to him a wider and more firm basis of hope and consolation than anything which he could find in his own history. The question was whether God was with His people, and therefore with him: if he could feel persuaded that God was with His Church, and that he was a member of it, he would feel that it was weak and impious to complain because at one particular moment a cloud was passing over the sun; and if he asked this question, he would soon find an answer: the wonderful history of the Jewish Church at once rose before his mind; the mighty deliverance of Israel from the power and bondage of Pharaoh; the going back of the waters of the Red sea; and all the wonders of the after-journeyings and the successful arrival in the promised land; all these things were deeply impressed in the mind of every Jewish child, it was his inheritance, his birthright, to hear from his parents of all the mighty works which Jehovah had done for his fathers in the time of old: and thus, when David seeks comfort in the thought of God's strength as compared with his own infirmity, he simply and naturally as it were runs

back to the early history of the Jewish Church: "Thou hast mightily delivered thy people, even the sons of Jacob and Joseph: the waters saw Thee, O God, the waters saw Thee, and were afraid; the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water, the air thundered, and Thine arrows went abroad. The voice of Thy thunder was heard round about, the lightnings shone upon the ground; the earth was moved and shook withal. Thy way is in the sea, and Thy paths in the great waters; and Thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest Thy people like sheep, by the hand of Moses and Aaron." And thus he abruptly ends the Psalm, as though the conclusion were manifest; that is, as though the picture which he had drawn of God's ancient deliverance of His Church had entirely stablished his mind in the great truth of God's continual presence; and if God were with His Church, and David a member of it, he had sufficient to make distrust a fault and despondency a sin.

And I will remark here, that we may learn a useful lesson from this character of the Psalm; I mean that we may well admire and imitate that temper of mind, which led David in his trouble not to dwell so much upon past mercies to his individual self, as upon the more striking and majestic manifestations of power on behalf of the

whole Church. If any man ever had singular personal experience of divine blessing to fall back upon, it was David, and I doubt not that he did not think lightly of what had been done for him; we are sure that he did not: but still there was something so much more grand and extended in the contemplation of the salvation of a whole nation and Church than in that of the salvation of himself, that he seems to forget his own deliverances in a deliverance more mighty still. So I would say, that in our own days the question to our minds should be, "Hath God spoken in these latter days to the world by His Son?" if not, then no fancy of individual favour of God to ourselves can give us any solid basis of comfort and hope; but if we believe that God hath so spoken, if in fact this be our very faith, the very corner-stone of our spiritual being, then it is so great and majestic a truth that the contemplation of it ought to support us under all trying circumstances. For let any man review the simple circumstances of the redemption of the world, in the same manner that David reviewed the deliverance from Egypt: David indulged in no highly-wrought figures, but he only recited the marvellous manner in which God led His people like sheep by the hand of Moses and Aaron; and so let any one recite the marvellous manner in

which God has redeemed His people through Jesus Christ, as he finds it in the Apostles' Creed; let him solemnly recal his own mind to faith in "Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, descended into hell, rose again from the dead, ascended up into heaven to sit on the right hand of God." Does a man believe this? does he in his heart believe that God hath thus visited His people and redeemed the world from bondage, and laid the foundation of a Church in such an unspeakable way? and does he also believe that he has been made by God's grace a member of that Church? then he has here such a foundation of faith as he may well rest upon securely. And I say, that no thought of individual mercies is nearly so safe or so sure, as a contemplation such as this of God's infinite love to mankind, shewn in the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that as David concluded his hymn of praise with the words, "Thou leddest thy people like sheep by the hand of Moses and Aaron," so we may very well make use of a Christian paraphrase and say, "Thou hast purchased to Thyself an universal Church, by the precious blood of Thy beloved Son."

But now let me impress upon you particularly

that portion of the text, in which, after having weighed the circumstances of his condition, David comes to the conclusion, "it is mine own infirmity." Observe first, how the spirit of this conclusion is worked out in our Church services: the main thing which the Christian man seeks is peace with God, and as the means of peace he seeks pardon; this is the very thing which the Lord Jesus Christ has rendered possible, and which we are taught in all services, whether public or private, whether in our own chambers or at the altar of the Holy Sacrament, to seek as the great boon of the Christian covenant. And how are we taught to seek it? this is the point to which I wish to call your attention: the first step is confession of "our own infirmity"; however devoid we may be of spiritual peace and comfort, however we may have reason to fear that our hearts are not right with God, however we may feel distressed and ill at ease, the first step is to acknowledge that we have erred and strayed like lost sheep, and that there is no health in us. This is the case with our ordinary morning and evening prayers; it is still more remarkably the case in the service for Holy Communion. It might have been thought that no confession of sin could be written, which should be suitable to all persons and to all times; and those dissenters

who eschew set forms of prayer might probably select this as a salient point against the Church system, arguing that it is impossible that a printed confession of sin can be the sufficient outpouring of every heart at every season: and doubtless each person must have sins of his own to confess, which only his own heart and God can know, and which in the secrecy of his own chamber he will make known with sorrow and seek to have pardoned; but the question is, whether it be not possible to express in a general form that tone of mind, with which every Christian man must come before God to acknowledge the greatness of God and his own infirmity; and whether the confessions of our Church service and Liturgy do not precisely express that self-condemnation, which every Christian, whatever may be his peculiar faults and sins, ought to feel right heartily when he comes to present himself before God; and which also he is bound to express, in the attitude of a suppliant, reverently, on his knees, if he would hope to obtain the blessing he seeks. Ah! Christian Brethren, I have often wondered when I have seen the easy, lazy, listless manner in which Christians sometimes acknowledge their own infirmity, when I have observed them resting in apparent carelessness on their seats instead of bending themselves into that posture which Christ

our Lord hallowed by adopting it Himself,—I have wondered, I say, whether these easy followers of the Lord can possibly feel the infirmity, which to all appearance it costs them so little trouble to confess. Indeed I cannot think that any one, who really groans under that infirmity, which he feels to be ever marring his best actions and pulling him back from the performance of his good resolutions, I cannot think that any one who is thus minded can consider any posture fit for confession, but that of the most lowly reverence.

This however is a digression, though I believe not a useless one: what I wish to impress upon you is, that the preparation for public worship which the Prayer-book enjoins is precisely founded as it were on the experience of David, who could find no peace for his soul until he had acknowledged that whatever cloud there was between his own soul and God was the result of his own infirmity. And now I would go on to say, that each one of us in the ordinary progress both of his temporal and spiritual life may find much that is worthy of his imitation, in the conduct of David as expressed in the text. I mean that in all the roughnesses of the road which we have to pass over, we may, after first acknowledging our own infirmity, repose our minds on the thought

of God's mercies to us in days gone by. For though I have spoken to you of the general view of God's redemption of the world, as so great a manifestation of mercy as almost to eclipse all other and smaller lights, still I think that we should be ungrateful and blind to God's providential care over ourselves, if we did not endeavour to trace His guiding hand in the history of our own lives. And I think that most persons, although they may be ready under the present pinch of adverse circumstances to complain, "God hath forgotten to be gracious," will nevertheless, on a calm and quiet review of their lives, be able from their hearts to confess their own hastiness and infirmity, and to acknowledge that all has been working for good. Of course it is impossible to know the history of each individual man; what a complicated tale would be the history of the very simplest man, if any one were able to pourtray with delicate pencil all that has been done for him and by him from his childhood to his age! no man knows this history of another, only imperfectly does he know it of himself; and therefore in speaking of it, I can only give such general hints as may lead those of you, who may be so disposed, to follow out the thought in your own particular cases.

I shall confine what I have to say to two re-

marks; one upon a man's temporal history, and one upon his spiritual. And first with regard to temporal things; I mean a man's life in this world so far as that life depends for its comfort and support upon worldly blessings. I suppose that almost every man is liable in this respect to ups and downs, if I may so speak; that there will be times when most persons will be inclined to take a gloomy view of their prospects, and to indulge or at least give way to that temper of mind which would lead them to say, "God hath forgotten to be gracious." Now we might say at once to any Christian person who took this view of his condition, it is directly contrary to your Christian profession; for as a Christian you are bound to believe that all is working together for good; yea, though it please God to strip a man of all his earthly possessions, or of those who may be dearest to him, it is manifestly his duty to say, as Job did say with much smaller spiritual advantages, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" But however much this may be a duty, it may be difficult to perform; and what I wish to point out to you from my present subject is, the kind of meditation which is likely to bring a man into such a state of mind, that an expression like that used by Job may be

no empty cant, but the sincere feeling of his heart. I should say then, let any man look back upon his past history, and I shall be much surprised if he does not see in it from time to time such manifest marks of a "divinity shaping his ends," of an influence over his life guiding him, watching him, preserving him, as shall enable him from the strength even of his own personal recollections to bow with joy to the will of God. Of course if every man in his adversity felt keenly persuaded of God's presence with him, he would not, he could not, give way to murmuring and desponding thoughts; but at such times there is an evident opportunity, which the Tempter will by no means omit to make the best of, an opportunity for pouring into the mind thoughts of disloyalty and feelings of distrust. And I say, let a man so tried throw himself back upon past mercies, let him "remember the years of the right hand of the Most Highest"; and if he has been able to trace the hand of God throughout the years that are past, he will see that it is as unreasonable, as it is sinful and mischievous to himself, to doubt the providence of God, because the dealings of that providence may just now be painful and hard to bear.

But, secondly, I wish to make a remark upon the bearing of this subject upon a man's spiritual

history. Now I do not wish to encourage any feverish kind of religion, any hot and cold fits of devotion, because I believe that the life of the soul like the life of the body is then most healthful, when it is most free from paroxysms, and most even and quiet in its course. Nevertheless I believe that it is impossible for any one who looks upon religion as a serious thing, who regards himself as a being endowed with a spiritual and divine life which is to be constantly and earnestly cherished, I believe it is impossible for any one who is thus minded, to live for ever in what may be called spiritual sunshine. There will be times when the soul's sensibility to spiritual impressions, when the sense of that "peace of God which passeth all understanding," when even the consciousness of loyal faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, will be so darkened, that a person may be led to the most gloomy and overwhelming thoughts respecting his own condition before God. Persons who have nothing corresponding to such experience in their own minds may smile at such thoughts, and may think that gaiety will dispel them; but the "heart knoweth its own bitterness," and such gloomy feelings are not the less gloomy because others do not share them. Now without entering at length into this subject, which is an extensive one, I would say that the course

pursued by David in the text seems to me to be the only true one; namely, to throw oneself back upon past mercies, and to remember the time when the peace of God shone in our hearts with such a pure and divine brightness, that we believed we should live in the light for evermore; to call to mind past seasons of spiritual joy, as perhaps the season of our first communion, when God seemed to be nearer to us than we had believed in this world He could be; to live thus in the past, to strive to believe that it is indeed "our own infirmity" that things are not so now. And thus, Christian Brethren, I believe, that every simpleminded earnest person who feeds his mind with the remembrance of God's goodness, and walks in the light of God's ordinances and in the ways of holiness and charity, will find that those words are true, that "to the godly there ariseth a light in the darkness," and that though "sorrow may endure for the night," yet the morning will come at length and bring joy with it.

SERMON VI.

STATE OF MAN IN PARADISE.

GENESIS ii. 7.

The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

THERE is no subject upon which our thoughts can rest with a greater mixture of pleasure and pain, than that of the state of our first parents before sin came into the world. All of us, I suppose, look back to the garden of Eden with inspiring thoughts of its loveliness and beauty; we picture to ourselves the first man and woman in all the fair colours of primal innocence, fresh from the hands of their Maker, pronounced like all other works of God to be very good; and we feel as though it were scarcely possible to imagine the exceeding happiness and bliss, in which they must have spent their sinless days in Paradise. On the other hand, we cannot but think bitterly

on Paradise lost, and grieve that the deceitfulness of sin and the subtilty of the Tempter were able to seduce our parents from their obedience, and bring sin and death into the world. And thus we must look back upon the state of Adam and Eve in Eden with mixed feelings of pleasure and pain; pleasure arising from the sight of their innocence and happiness, pain from the thought that the innocence and happiness are no more.

If we come a little closer to the subject, and endeavour to form distinct notions as to what the condition of Adam and Eve before the fall actually was, we find that there is very little in the Bible to satisfy our curiosity: the Bible was written for man in a fallen state, not for man in a state of purity, and therefore is principally occupied, not with the condition and history of man in Eden, but of man in this cold comfortless world under the blight of sin. Therefore we do not find enough to enable us to make out a complete account of what the life of Adam and Eve in Eden actually was; nevertheless something we are told, and though not very much, yet perhaps the hints which we have are on that account so much the more to be prized; and the little which we do learn seems to me to be important,—important because the knowledge of it may be very useful in enabling us to see a good deal of our real

condition at present, and in exciting us to strive earnestly to obtain the fruits of that blessed victory, whereby Christ our Redeemer has trampled upon the head of the Tempter and opened for us again the gates of the Paradise of God.

I propose therefore in this Sermon to say something concerning man's state before the fall; striving, while I treat on such a subject, rather to profit than amuse you, and above all things endeavouring to speak that, which shall be in accordance with God's truth.

Now the text tells us as much perhaps as any single verse respecting man's primitive condition, for it tells us the manner of his creation. What it says is this, that God made man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. You might say at first sight, that this verse taught us nothing concerning man's creation, that it only asserted that God had made him, and put life into him, and that this might be said of other creatures, for that God made them all of the dust and gave them all life. But a very little thought will shew, that this would not be a true conclusion; the best way to find out whether there is anything in the account of the creation of man, which makes his creation strikingly different from that of the beasts, is to compare the history of the two; and if we do this

we find something very striking. In the creation of the birds and fishes we read, "God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven;" and in the creation of the beasts and creeping things, "God said, let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind." Thus the inferior creatures were created by the word of God; they would seem to have come into existence in all their countless variety at the creative command of God. But when the history comes to the creation of man there is a very great difference; in the first place we have as it were a council in heaven, as though the work to be done were of very far greater importance than any which preceded; "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." Observe here the words "in *our* image, after *our* likeness," that is, the image and likeness of *God*,—very strong words, which I shall not dwell upon just now, but only observe that they shew that the model upon which man was to be made was something very different from all which

had gone before; in whatever way man was to bear the likeness of his Maker, that likeness he certainly was to bear, he was to be the present image of the unseen God, the highest reflexion of His likeness in a world where all things more or less, as being good and beautiful, shewed forth the glory of God. And as having God's likeness man was to have dominion over all other created things, he was to be their Lord, all other living creatures were to own his superiority and bow down to his will. This was the design of God, and it was carried into effect; for we read, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him."

You see then that it was the will of God, that there should be between man and the other creatures whom He had formed an enormous gulf; that men were intended to be raised above the beasts altogether in kind; that they were to be not merely superior, not merely animals higher than others, as we may say that a dog is higher than a worm, but that they were to be different as having a likeness which no other creature had, as being the image of God.

The text carries out this distinction between men and beasts very clearly and forcibly; it gives us an account of the creation of man, which, though we may not be able wholly to interpret

it, yet certainly teaches us very much when contrasted with the history of the formation of the lower creatures. The text tells us, that "God formed man out of the dust of the ground"—so far like the beasts, for they and we are all dust and return to dust alike—and "He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." The way in which man first received his life by a direct inbreathing of life from God, whatever difficulty we may find in determining how much it means, at least means as much as this, that man's life is a divine gift in a sense in which the life of beasts is not, that man's soul was put into him in a far more solemn manner than any other life was bestowed; just as when we build a common building for common purposes we roof it and finish it and begin to use it the next day without any ceremony, but when we build a church or a cathedral we open it with solemn forms and rites, and dedicate it in the most impressive manner we can devise to the service of Him whose it is. And when God had made man's body He had built a temple for Himself, a temple to be kept pure and clean, a temple not to be given up for the use of other gods beside Him; and therefore He did not merely say to it, "Rise and walk," but He breathed some of His own breath into it, gave it as it were a divine

life, and *so* man became a living soul. I would that all men remembered this their godlike origin: it is true that the likeness of God has been darkened and marred, and that man is something very different now from what he was when God first breathed into his nostrils; nevertheless his beginning was glorious, and though it is easy to find men in whom all trace of the godlike seems to have well-nigh departed, and the likeness to the beasts is much more clear than the reflexion of the image of God, and though few comparatively speaking exhibit much of the character which we should expect from such words as those of the text, yet we should bear in mind that this is not as it ought to be; man ought not to be thus degraded, he was intended for better things; and *he* is most likely to rise to what he ought to be, who thinks much of what God intended him to be, who remembers the divine life which was first given to him, and grieves that sin has entered into the world and spoiled the fair work of God.

Now let us examine the subject more accurately, and endeavour to see how much is intended by the text; in other words, let us endeavour to form for ourselves some notion of what the condition of man was, when God first made him and pronounced him very good.

There can be no doubt but that one great gift which Adam received from God was a highly intelligent mind, a mind capable of very great things; for we know what wonders the human mind is capable of now, we know what surprising results men of science and skill are able to arrive at, how all nature seems at their command, so that in fact one would rather ask what man cannot do than what he can; and certainly one cannot suppose, that the mind which was given to the first man was of a lower order, than that with which his fallen children have been blest. Some persons have thought on the other hand, that the mind of Adam in innocence was far above what men have been favoured with since, that a blight came with the fall upon his intellectual powers as well as upon all other parts of his being; this may or may not be: I cannot see however any reason in Scripture, or upon any other grounds, to suppose that the mind of man was thus weakened by his sin; the effects of the fall I imagine to have been very distinct from this, but I shall not dwell upon the point, because it is not so important as some others; for there are some endowments which man had at first which we know he has not now, there are some losses which we feel in ourselves that he has sustained, and we have enough to do in deploring and

striving to remedy these, without speculating concerning other losses, which are possible but not so sure.

I go on then to remark, that Adam received from His Maker a heart pure and spotless, a heart which loved what was good because it was good, and that in this respect his mind would be a reflexion of the pure holy mind of God. That which was holy would be delighted in by Adam, because it *was* holy, even as in heaven holiness is the happiness of saints and angels. There would be in the garden of Eden much to delight a being of far lower tastes than Adam, for we read that it abounded in trees pleasant to the eye and good for food, and doubtless even on this account the life of Adam and Eve in Paradise must have been a life full of joy; but I apprehend that the chief happiness of Adam was in something different from this, even in a love of holiness. Think what causes almost the whole of the misery which exists in the world; it is the existence of sin; there is an evil taste in the world, men love darkness and hate light, men love sin and hate holiness, and therefore it is that the world groans and hearts are heavy. But in Paradise there was no grief, because there was no sin. And God gave to Adam also a conscience, a voice within him; and this voice ever testified

for what was good; yea it has not ceased to speak even now, for we still know what is good though frequently we do it not, and every one feels that within which says, "this is the way, walk in it," whenever he walks in the way of holiness. But with us too frequently conscience is an accusing voice; or rather our hearts are frequently so different from what they ought to be, that conscience cannot approve, but can only condemn. Too frequently we find a law, that when we would do good evil is present with us. But this is disease; God did not make us in such a condition; it was different with Adam; his heart was tuned to holiness; and his conscience, though ever ready to condemn if required, was never forced to condemn until the day of his disobedience.

I may further observe, that when the text speaks of Adam receiving life from God, we may suppose that life to consist of two, what we may call the spiritual and the natural, the life of the soul and the life of the body; but both the one and the other of these do not appear to have been so given that they required no divine support; on the other hand, I think we can make out clearly what the divine means were, whereby each was continued and supported. Adam's spiritual life appears to have been supported by communion

with God; for we do in fact read of God speaking to Adam several times, and especially that appearance in the garden after the eating of the forbidden tree seems to have been only what Adam expected, as though he were in the habit of receiving spiritual communications from God in some mysterious manner. This is quite in accordance with all that we know of the character of God; he does not create beings to be independent, He gives no life except out of the fulness of His own life, and it is only Himself who has the unspeakable prerogative of living for and in Himself; we "live and move and have our being in Him," but He says of Himself, "I am, because I am." And thus I think we shall only be rightly interpreting Scripture, if we say that Adam had by frequent communion with Almighty God such supplies, as were required to renew that spiritual life which God had given to him.

Adam's natural life too seems to have been continued by supernatural means. The Apostle speaks of death coming into the world by sin, that is of death which undoubtedly was the lot of other creatures becoming the lot of man; yet we are not I think to suppose that man was created immortal, and that by sin he lost some vital power which God had given him: a truer view seems to me to be this, that he lost by sin those super-

natural means of support which he had enjoyed before. For when Adam and Eve had sinned and were expelled from Eden, one great curse upon them was that they were forbidden to go to "the *tree of life* which was in the midst of the garden." What was this tree of life? I conceive it to have been the means, the sacramental means I may perhaps call it, of preserving man from decay: so that as long as Adam and Eve were sinless and had access to the tree of life, so long, though not by nature immortal, death had no power over them; but so soon as they lost that tree they lost their support, and then death became their master, even as he was over all other creatures of flesh and blood.

Thus you will see, and I wish to call your attention especially to this point, that the life which Adam held, the life spiritual, the life natural, the peace of mind which he had in consequence of inward purity, and all the happiness he possessed, he held upon a certain condition; and that condition was *obedience to God*. God breathed into him the breath of life, and made him a living soul, but it was not that he should live for himself or in his own strength; far from it, God intended that man should be a reflexion of His own glory, that He should live by a stream of life flowing from Himself, that man's

spirit should thrive and grow by communion with the Holy Spirit. And God laid a command upon Adam, a command in the doing of which he should live, and in the breaking of which he should die: that command was the test of obedience, and the simplicity of it shewed for what it was intended, and was a kind of type of the simplicity of all God's commands. "Thou shalt not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." What a simple command! how easy to obey! and yet Adam broke it and lost those blessings with which he had been endowed, and that life which God had breathed into him. Yet who is he who condemns his first parents, and says that the command was easy and the burden light? who will venture thus virtually to assert, that he himself would have kept the command? *Easy to obey!* why, Brethren, all God's commands are easy to obey, and yet we do not obey them; Christ's yoke is easy and his burden light, and yet what thousands of persons prefer the heavy burden of sin! The fact is, that we are all prone to disobey; we have all a spirit of pride in us, which revolts from the humble attitude of persons implicitly obeying God's will; we are headstrong, we must have our own way, and Satan whispers in our ear the while, "Ye shall not surely die; God has said so, but so it

will not be; ye will be as gods, knowing good and evil." Alas! alas! it was not in Eden only, that the Tempter has uttered such blasphemy against the Most High, as that which he spoke to our first parents. "Ye shall not surely die" has been the most constant and perhaps the most successful lie, with which the father of lies has from the beginning until now seduced the souls of men.

But I must conclude. I have been speaking concerning the condition of man in Paradise, and I have tried to point out to you what kind of happiness he had, what his endowments were, what kind of life he had, and how his life and his happiness were preserved. And now I will add, that through the merits of our blessed Redeemer we look forward to a restoration of that life and happiness, which Adam forfeited by his sin; he who overcomes will be admitted again to the Paradise of God, and permitted to eat once more of the tree of life.* For that joyful restoration let us wait patiently, and strive earnestly that we fail not of the promise. In the meanwhile let us remember, that though we have not now that perfect likeness of our Maker in which we were created, though the image of God is broken and defaced and marred, yet even now

* Rev. ii. 7.

there is much in us which shews that we were meant to be great and glorious, and that each one of us may exhibit features of wonderful likeness to God if only he strives against sin and follows after holiness. God has given us life again, even after we had sinned; even in this world man may live again; those who are born anew of water and the Holy Ghost may even yet put forth green leaves, and flourish and bear fruit to God's honour. Only let us remember, that whatever life God has given us is like the life given to Adam, not a life to be preserved by our own strength, not a life which we can live of ourselves, but one which can only be maintained by constant communion with God; in fact, it is not we that live but Christ who liveth in us, and the life which we live we must live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Thanks to God, who hath caused us to be born again, and to have that new life which by nature we cannot have! Therefore, while we grieve over the bliss which our first parents lost, let us ascribe glory and praise to Him who pitied our estate, and made it possible that the divine image should be restored and the joys of Paradise regained.

SERMON VII.

THE GOSPEL REVEALED TO BABES.

S. MATTHEW xi. 25—30.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Even so, Father : for so it seemed good in Thy sight.

All things are delivered unto Me of My Father : and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father : neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

I HAVE taken as many as six verses for a text, because they assist in interpreting each other ; but the subject which I intend to bring before you is chiefly contained in the first three verses. It is my wish to clear away, if possible, a difficulty which seems to hang over the words of our Lord

recorded in those verses, and to obviate the danger of incorrect conclusions being drawn from them; but I could not help observing, that our Lord's latter words contained themselves the best commentary upon His former words, that the last three verses of the text were the best light to the darkness which might hang over the first three, and that a person could not very well deduce incorrect conclusions, who had thoroughly entered into the spirit of that merciful invitation with which the text concludes. Now let me explain myself upon these points; and if we should touch upon delicate ground in the course of our discussion, let us pray God to be with us by His Spirit to guide us into all truth.

I observe then, that there seems to be a difficulty hanging over the words of our Lord in the first verse of the text. Our Lord thanks His heavenly Father, because He has hid the knowledge of His truth from the wise and prudent and has revealed it to babes; and these words may be used to support the notion, that Almighty God has by an eternal decree revealed His will to some and hidden it from others, entirely irrespectively of the moral condition of those persons; they may be used to support that view of God's providence, according to which a man imagines that he has himself no concern in his own sal-

vation, that he must lie without effort to help himself until a supernatural and irresistible power comes to him from without and makes him a new creature. I am here alluding to a question, which has given rise to an enormous amount of dispute and discussion; and it is a question which I cannot and do not desire to examine now at length: all that I am anxious to do is this—to point out the right meaning of our Lord's words in the text, which may, as I imagine, very easily be perverted to a false meaning in connexion with the controversy in question. Observe, I do not say that there is no difficulty about our Lord's words, so that they who pervert them to a wrong meaning must necessarily pervert them wilfully; on the other hand, I at once allow that there is a difficulty, and I observe also that this difficulty is increased by the parallel passage in S. Luke,* where we read that our Lord "*rejoiced in spirit*" when He uttered the words of the text: the reason why I speak of this addition of S. Luke's increasing the difficulty is, that if the text should express that God has by an absolute decree hidden the Gospel from some of His creatures, then we might feel surprised that such an order of His Providence should be the only subject of rejoicing which is recorded on the part of our blessed

* S. Luke, x. 21.

Saviour; for it is remarkable, particularly as a commentary upon that passage, "He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," that there is in the Gospels but one recorded instance of the Saviour rejoicing, and that was when He thanked His Father for having hid His mysteries from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. However, I believe that if we examine our Lord's words carefully, we shall find that there is no real difficulty in the matter, and that we shall be able to find cause of rejoicing and of thankfulness to God in those very things, to which our Lord referred in the text. In order that we may arrive at this result, I shall call your attention to several leading features in our Saviour's words.

In the first place, I will observe that the word which our English version renders "I thank Thee," is in reality of more extended meaning. It means something of this kind, "I confess, I acknowledge, Thy great wisdom." And the reason why I call your attention to this point is this, that you may see that there was something in the dispensation of God's providence, of which our Saviour speaks, which at once commended itself to His holy mind as wise and good; not merely something in which He saw the demonstration of God's power, which proved God's omnipotence, but rather that which equally proved His mercy, His goodness, His

wisdom; the Lord in the text addresses God as the Lord of Heaven and Earth, as Him according to the will of whose unerring mind all things have their laws and whom all creatures must obey, and the Lord's words are those of a person who has seen in the ways of men much injustice and cruelty and hardness, and who turns from such to the doings of God, and admires in them that perfection of all excellence and wisdom which he missed in the ways of men. And our Lord was speaking from earth to his Father in heaven; He spoke as a *man* therefore, and His confession of God's wisdom and His thankfulness to Him must, as one would imagine, find an echo in the hearts of us men; it is not to be believed but that, if we can gain the same view of God's dealings which Christ the Lord had, we too shall instinctively be filled with the same feelings of thankfulness, and the same readiness to acknowledge God's goodness and wisdom. And hence also we may fairly conclude that we have misunderstood the passage, if the consideration of God's dealings, as referred to by the Lord Jesus Christ, does not tend to make us sympathize in our Lord's joy.

But again, you must observe, that when our Lord says, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed

them unto babes," the words are not to be understood, as though God had by some inflexible decree hidden the truths of the Gospel from certain persons called wise and prudent, and as though this "sending of the rich empty away" were a subject of joy either to Jesus Christ our Lord, or to any holy man; to suppose this would be to shock every right feeling of our hearts, and would be directly opposed to such conduct as that of our Lord when He wept over the guilty city, or when He prayed for His murderers on the very ground that they knew not what they were doing. Take the former of these instances; it is emphatically a case of the things of God being hidden from the wise and prudent; our Lord says, "If thou hadst known at least in this thy day the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes"—*hid from thine eyes*—words which exactly tally with those of the text—"hid these things from the wise and prudent"; the case of impenitent Jerusalem therefore will throw light on the text. How were the things which concerned her peace hidden from her eyes? by God's inflexible decree? nay, but by her own sin; here was that which had blinded her, contempt of God's mercies, and therefore it may truly be said that she had blinded herself; she had sinned against the light, had despised

God's warnings, and so, like all others who have done the same, she had become hardened. When therefore we read, that God has hidden things which concern their peace from the wise and prudent, we may safely say that the thing intended is, that these wise and prudent men have hidden them from themselves, that there is some defect in their method of treating God's message, or some root of bitterness in themselves, which renders them unable to see that which even babes are able to see clearly. And when our Lord rejoices, that "God hath hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to babes," we may conclude, that, although God's justice cannot be taxed on account of these men rejecting the Gospel, seeing that they have blinded themselves, still it is not that blindness which is a cause of thankfulness and joy: quite the contrary; in the case of Jerusalem it made our Lord weep; the cause of joy and thankfulness is this, that *although* the wise and prudent rejected the Gospel, yet the babes, the simple ones, received it; that *although* He Himself were a stumbling-block and rock of offence to many, and those wise in this world, still the poor and simple received Him as their Saviour. Let me illustrate this by an example: if I said, I rejoice in my native country, because in it the wicked suffer the penalties of the law, and the

good are happy and free; should I mean that the sufferings of wicked men were a matter of joy to me? or should I not rather intend to express, that whereas the wicked suffered the good were happy, and that this happiness of the good was matter for joy? I should grieve that there were any wicked, I should grieve that it was necessary to vindicate the majesty of the law by punishing offenders, but I should know that in every state the safety and happiness of the innocent can only be secured by executing the law against the guilty; and therefore I might truly say, that I rejoiced and was thankful to live in a country, where the guilty are punished and the innocent are happy. Even so it is not the rejection of the Gospel by the wise and prudent, but the fact that *although* they rejected it the simple and humble accepted it, which gave rise to our Lord's thankfulness and joy. So that in fact the meaning of the first verse of the text would be expressed by some such words as these, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that although the wise and prudent have shut their eyes to the wonders of Thy Gospel, still Thou hast revealed them in all their majesty and beauty to every simplehearted man, who has sought Thee in earnestness and sincerity."

But this leads us to ask, What does our Lord mean by *wise* and *prudent*? these are words capable of a good sense; all the writings of Solomon teem with the praise of these two very qualities, wisdom and prudence; yet it is obvious that our Lord uses them in a very different sense, forasmuch as He represents them as hindrances to the reception of the Gospel. And here we come upon a point, to which S. Paul alludes more than once in his Epistles; as when he speaks of “not many wise men, not many noble, being called;” and of “God taking the foolish things of the world to confound the wise”; and again, of “the preaching of the cross being to them that perish foolishness, but to them who are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Now it is obvious that the text cannot mean that God has hidden the Gospel from all those who are endued with powerful minds, or who are learned in such things as pertain to this world; for, as it would be an insult to the Gospel to suppose this to be true, as it would be all that its worst enemy could desire in condemnation of it that it should be admitted to be incompatible with human science and learning, and with the conclusions of human reason, so is the supposition utterly contrary to fact. For to go no further, what was S. Paul but one of the wise and prudent

in this sense? a man of eminently high powers of mind, and good education according to his times; and yet it is manifest that his wisdom and prudence, so far from hiding from him the truths of the Gospel, were the means in God's hands of enabling him to see deeper into its mysteries than almost any other man of his age. And the same remarks would hold of S. Peter and S. John; and in times after the apostolical we shall find, that many of those, who have been the most notable instruments for the propagation of the Gospel, have been men as remarkable for their talents and learning as for their religious zeal. I lay some stress upon this point, because I think there is a tendency in our days to imagine that knowledge and talents stand in the way of simple Christian faith; that the Christian religion requires us to do violence to our reason; that when we enter upon questions concerning the Bible, or concerning the mysteries of our faith, we are to give up all those principles and modes of judging of truth, which we should maintain in other subjects; and that in fact, the expression of God hiding His truth from the wise and prudent and revealing it to babes may be taken as implying, that a clear head and a well-informed and well-disciplined mind are obstacles in the way of a due appreciation of the Gospel.

Now I should say at once, that this is an unmanly, unworthy view of Christ's revelation; if it were true, it would at once condemn the Christian religion: if we have a message purporting to come to us from God, and to be carried by His Son who has condescended for that purpose to become man, and if in order to believe this message we are obliged to hoodwink the eyes of our reason, and cramp our minds, and restrain those faculties which God has given us for the express purpose of refusing the evil and choosing the good, then it is utterly impossible for any reasonable man to accept that message. Rather should we expect to find, as I believe in the Gospel we do find, the worthiest object for all our powers to fix upon; we should expect to find such a light upon all the ways of God, such a clearing up of difficulties, as should make us confess Jesus Christ to be the very "wisdom and power of God". If it be said that the wisdom and prudence of this world can never reveal God to us, and can never be a substitute for that revelation which God has been pleased to make to us in Jesus Christ, this is indeed most true, and contains the meaning of the words of the text: for the first appreciation of the value of the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires something, for which no talent, no learning or wisdom or prudence, can be any substitute, any

more than seeing can be hearing, or hearing can be smelling. And if the wise and the prudent very often miss the message of the Gospel, this is probably the point at which they go wrong; they imagine that they have in their own wisdom and prudence the guide to all they want to know; but it is not by his wisdom or his prudence that man holds communion with God; it is not by reasoning that he learns his true relation to God. For what is that true relation? it is that relation in which a man stands by *sin*, the relation of a lost sheep wandering and straying to a shepherd willing to lead it back again; and it is obvious that no wisdom or prudence can teach a man this; and that is why our Lord in the last verses of the text gives the invitation, of which I have already spoken as the best commentary upon his other and more difficult words. Observe that invitation: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—labour under what? heavy laden with what burden? surely with the burden of sin; with the sense of God's holiness and our own unworthiness; and the boon offered is *rest*, therefore they who accept the invitation must feel the need of rest, must feel that there is a contest within them, a contest of passions, of desires to do good and tendencies to do evil, and the like, for which no earthly

physician can devise a cure. Again the invitation continues, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for My yoke is easy and My burden is light:" here we have clearly a proposal to change masters, a proposal made to persons who are supposed to be smarting under a very bad master and wishing to be rid of him; and the excellence of the change of masters, and the lightness of Christ's yoke as compared with that of the world, the flesh, and the devil, is clearly something which in the nature of things no wisdom or prudence, no books, no reasoning, can teach: a man who has done a hard day's work does not feel weary because he has studied anatomy, but because his limbs ache and his energy flags; and so, in like manner, nothing but a sense of the emptiness of things temporal and the weariness of the service of sin, can make a man enter into the meaning of Christ's words, and therefore make him eager to accept His invitation. Here then we see how it is, that the Gospel which the wise and prudent despise may be accepted by babes, that is, by the poorest, the weakest, the simplest, the most ignorant; and yet we are not compelled to allow, that there is anything in the Gospel to which our highest reason refuses assent; because

wisdom and prudence can never teach man that he is a sinner, or make him sigh for the rest which Christ alone can give; and yet if he have but this sense of his need of a Saviour, then he may find in the message of God to man by the Lord Jesus Christ the highest wisdom, the noblest subject for his thoughts, the most perfect mirror of all which his heart and his reason approve.

Once more, I will call your attention to the assertion in the text, an assertion in perfect harmony with so much of what we read in the Gospel of S. John, that "no man knows the Father but the Son and he to whom the Son will reveal Him." In such words as these the Lord points to Himself as the channel of divine grace to mankind; if a man wishes to know God, whom to know is life eternal, then he must seek to know Him in and through Jesus Christ; therefore the character and temper of mind of the Lord Jesus Christ may be to us a very good index of the character and temper of mind, to which the mysteries of God will be revealed. Now that which strikes us in the picture of the Lord given us in the Gospels is chiefly His humility, His gentleness, His meekness; He Himself says in the text, *I am meek and lowly of heart*,—that is the characteristic which He holds forth as a sufficient argument to men to receive His

yoke; and hence we may see why the Gospel is spoken of as being revealed to babes, because those who are most like the Lord Jesus Christ, who exhibited the character of simplicity and lowliness, are most accessible to the claims of the Gospel; and those who can most admire the character, which our Lord exhibited to the world, will manifestly know most of God, whom it is the very office of Christ to reveal to mankind.

And now I think we shall have no difficulty in entering into the force of our Lord's words, when He acknowledges the goodness and wisdom of God's dealings. He says, "even so, Father: for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight;" not because the Father (with reverence be it spoken) had adopted some method of distributing His mercies, which appeared repugnant to our sense of justice, but which nevertheless became right because God had adopted it; but because the ways of God, as the Lord described them, were essentially such as to commend themselves to the admiration and love of all simple-minded holy men. For what do we see in this world? this world, in which sin has introduced disturbance, and discords into the harmony of God's works? what do we see but this, clever wickedness prospering; the wise and prudent in this world pressing before and gaining the advantage over the simple, the babes; talent and

wit estimated much more highly than virtue and humility; altogether an incorrect standard for measuring one man against another? I do not say that this is without exception, but I am sure that all must allow that as a general rule in this world might is right, and that the patient, forbearing, forgiving character, which Jesus Christ first exhibited to the world in all its completeness and majesty, is strangely undervalued and despised. And our blessed Lord saw this, and He saw that in His kingdom it was different; and He felt, that He was restoring to the world that true judgment of what is good and excellent, which sin had marred; and therefore He rejoiced in spirit, and acknowledged thankfully the goodness and wisdom of God. And if we, Christian Brethren, can enter into our Lord's views, we shall be able to sympathize in His joy; and what we rejoice in will not be the degradation of wisdom or prudence, or of any of the high attributes with which God has blessed us His creatures, but our joy will be this, that a fountain is open for sin and uncleanness in which the simplest may wash and be clean, if only he feel his pollution and desire to be purified; what we joy in is the free unmerited grace of God, which requires on our parts no natural gifts and endowments, but only a hearty weariness of sin, and

a willingness to take His yoke; yea, we rejoice that we ourselves are able to come with confidence to the throne of grace, and to know the Father through Jesus Christ.

In conclusion then I would say, that the whole key to our Lord's language may be found in the last words of the text. He is using language which can only be appreciated and understood by those, who can feel the strength of His gracious invitation as addressed to themselves; "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" these words are the key to the whole Gospel, and therefore also to all passages in which the laws of the Gospel dispensation are spoken of. Now our Christian life consists in a continual coming to Christ; we are ever represented in Scripture, as having no life in ourselves, but as drawing all we have continually from Jesus Christ our head; therefore I say, that our Christian life consists in continual coming to Christ according to His invitation; coming by prayer, coming by sacraments, coming by deeds of mercy and charity, coming by penitence, coming by a life of faith. And the strength of our zeal in thus coming to Him depends upon our feeling that without Him we cannot live,—aye, and cannot die either; that sin ever darkens our view of God, and that He only can clear the

view for us and so give us peace. Therefore I should say, Brethren, strive to gain deeper views of the nature of sin as thus darkening your view of God; strive to feel more and more your own deficiencies in holiness, in purity, in charity, in humility, in all Christlike qualities; and then you will feel more deeply the meaning of Christ's invitation, "Come unto Me;" and then too you will feel and rejoice in that mercy and goodness of God, which has provided for you what no wisdom or prudence of your own could ever have attained, even the means of knowing Him through His Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON VIII.

CHRIST BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN.

S. MARK x. 13, 14, 15, 16.

And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them : and His disciples rebuked those that brought them.

But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not : for of such is the kingdom of God.

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them.

THIS passage is, as you well know, read as a part of the Baptismal Office ; and an exhortation is founded upon it, in which the Church justifies the practice of bringing little children to the Christian font : after pointing out the manner in which the Saviour Himself commanded the little children to be brought to Him, and even held them up to others as examples of innocency, the Priest is instructed to assure the congregation, that

beyond all doubt Christ will in like manner accept those who are brought to Him, and give them the blessing of eternal life and make them heirs of His kingdom. I suppose that on account of the manifest difficulty, which attaches to the administration of a sacrament, requiring repentance and faith, to a babe incapable of both the one and the other, it was thought desirable upon every occasion when a child was brought to be baptized, to explain that the Church believed such an order of things to be most agreeable to the will of Christ: I say the *manifest difficulty*, because I think that any one who looks at baptism by itself, considers its requirements, its conditions, its supposed effects, would be inclined at first thought to say that it was a sacrament for adults only; and we know that there are a considerable number of persons, who are unable to get over the difficulty, and who therefore live in secession from the Church upon this point. Yet there are even greater difficulties the other way; that is, it is more difficult to believe, that a body like the Christian Church should have no means of bringing into covenant with Christ the little ones of His redeemed family: and on the whole I think, that the most mature and careful reflexion will bring us to conclude, that the practice of infant baptism, which we may call the Catholic practice,

that is, the general and recognized practice of the Christian Church, is indeed worthy of being followed as most agreeable to Christ's institution.

Nevertheless, that the subject is not without difficulty is proved by the fact of the abundance of controversy to which it has given rise; difficulty however, not so much about the duty of infant baptism itself, as about the nature and extent of the blessing which it conveys; difficulty also it may be observed, a considerable portion of which would belong equally to adult baptism and to infant. And it will not be satisfactory to say, that provided the duty be admitted it matters not what people think of the blessing obtained; for though in one sense this is true, yet on the other hand it is quite certain, that if the blessings be depreciated, the practice itself will soon be neglected and despised. Hence it seems to me, that any remarks which may tend to throw light on this subject are worthy of our utmost attention: I know very well that the subject involves a certain kind of difficulty which cannot be removed, but whatever difficulties arise from our own misconceptions or prejudices do appear capable of being at least relieved; and it is to some points of this kind, that I desire to draw your attention in this sermon.

I have long thought, that the passage which I

have taken as a text had a meaning as regards the spiritual influence attaching to infant baptism, beyond that which the exhortation in the Baptismal service appears to assign to it. The argument there used is, that as Jesus Christ received infants in the days of His flesh, so He will receive them now; the exhortation perhaps chiefly strikes us, as setting forth the merciful temper and divine condescension of the Lord in not allowing the infants to be driven away; but there is a deeper view than this, which I do not say that the exhortation has missed, but which at all events it does not put forward prominently. Our Lord's conduct seems to prove, that infants are susceptible of spiritual influences, that it is possible for infants to receive a blessing real, yea beyond price, and yet impalpable and easily despised or denied: I do not say, that the infants whom Christ blessed received precisely the same blessing as that which infants receive in baptism, whatever that may be; but if we find it necessary to admit, that infants were benefited by being brought to Christ, and that every difficulty which belongs to the question of infant baptism belongs in an equal degree to the case of the infants received and blessed by Christ, then we shall feel that it is far from incredible, rather that it is in the highest degree probable, that infants brought into Christ's

spiritual presence in His own ordinance do receive a real spiritual benefit thereby.

In the first place then, *did* the children who were brought to Christ receive any benefit? It is clear that the parents thought that they would; nay, they were even what would be called in these days superstitious about the matter, for they brought the children that they might be "*touched*;" they evidently imagined that Christ's body was so holy, that contact with it would have a wholesome influence, like a charm to drive away evil. And it is clear also, that the disciples regarded the children as unfit subjects for the Saviour's notice; if they had believed that the children could have received any blessing, they would certainly not have driven them rudely away. Moreover between these two parties our Lord inclined to the former; that is, although He might not favour the notions, which perhaps some of them held respecting the healing influence of His mere bodily touch, yet He distinctly commanded, that the infants should not be dismissed, as being incapable of receiving any gift at His hands. And when we read, as we do in the last verse of the text, that "He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them," I should deem it impiety to suppose that they received no benefit; even if this benediction had been given without any of those

attendant circumstances of which the text tells us, I should think that we were derogating from the dignity of Christ by supposing, that His hands touched and His mouth spake words of blessing in vain, that a blessing from Him was but as a blessing from ourselves, implying a kind wish and a feeling of anxious love; I could not allow the notion of vain touch and vain speech being attributed to Him, whose will is the law of the Universe; but when I find the benediction given in the teeth of the objections of the disciples who would have kept the infants away, when I find it accompanied by an express declaration that little children are proper subjects of His gracious influences, how can I doubt that His words which contained the blessing were also effective in bringing a blessing down? I think that any one who considers the question carefully will be convinced, that reverence for the Saviour's character and power will not allow us to attribute any other than a very strong meaning to such words as these, "He put His hands on them, and blessed them."

Let us admit then, that through the faith of their parents or friends these children received an advantage, which other children not blessed by Christ did not receive: so much I think it is easy to grant. But when we come to inquire

what that advantage was, the answer is not so easy. It may perhaps be said, that they received no advantage above others, but were themselves only the type as it were of the whole race, and that the whole race of infants were blessed in them: be it so; still the question remains, what advantage did they, or the race through them, receive? And here I conceive that there is a difficulty; and it is much more easy to say what the benefit was not, than to define accurately what it was. For instance, was it a certainty of salvation that these infants received? Surely not, it would be impiety to imagine it for a moment; Adam and Eve were blest by God and pronounced very good, yet Adam and Eve fell; and Judas must, I suppose, have often received the blessing of His Master, although he turned out a traitor. Indeed the ultimate safety of every one is so entirely limited by the condition, "whoso endureth to the end, the same shall be saved," so much depends upon daily diligence and fear and trembling, that to attribute a certainty of final acceptance to any one act or to any one spiritual influence, even to a blessing pronounced by the Lord Himself, would be monstrous and absurd; and therefore the certainty of salvation was not the consequence to these children of receiving the blessing of the Lord.

Again, was it security from temptation? would Christ's blessing serve ever after as a charm against evil spirits, keeping the children in after-life free from trial and from the dangers and troubles connected with it? Surely not: in this world of trial and temptation it has never been granted to any to have exemption; on the other hand, those have usually been the best and holiest, who have been most subject to them; and if one of those happy children who received Christ's blessing imagined, that in afterlife he need take no pains in resisting the devil or curbing the flesh, if he imagined that the touch of Christ in His infancy would remain to him in its virtue and efficacy throughout his life, keeping from him all hurtful things and making his path free from spiritual danger, it is manifest that he would deceive himself, that he would be guilty of abusing his privilege, that he would turn the Saviour's blessing into a curse. I do not suppose, that any one of the children would be likely to take this view of what had been done for him in infancy; I think rather, that when those children came to years of discretion, and were told by their parents (as doubtless they would be told) of this remarkable passage in their childish history, when they attended the Christian assemblies and heard what manner of person

Christ was, when they heard of His holiness and purity, or still further when they began to realize His divine nature, when they knew Him not only as a man "who went about doing good," but as the Son of God, "God manifest in the flesh," and then connected this with the fact that they themselves had been touched and blessed by Him, they would at once rise above all low views of their blessedness, and would strive only to walk as they should walk, whom the Saviour of the world had blessed. They never would imagine that they were free from danger, but they would feel bold to meet any danger to which they might be exposed in the strength of Him who had given them such a pledge of his love. They would believe that Christ had claimed their bodies as His temples, yet not as temples locked and barred, into which no foul thing could enter, but as temples the gates of which they must themselves ever keep from intruders with all watchfulness and care.

But further; was the benefit of such a kind, that it would be manifest to all men and to the children themselves in afterlife, that they had received it? was it such that it would be impossible for those who were disposed to do so, to deny that any benefit had been received? I think that certainly the blessing was not of this kind:

I can easily believe, that if any one of the children turned out careless and reprobate, he could easily persuade himself that neither he nor any of the rest were any the better for Christ's touch. I can believe in like manner, that any parents, who might have neglected to present their children to Christ when they had the opportunity, could easily reconcile themselves afterwards to the belief that their children had lost nothing by it, that they were as well provided for as those whom Christ touched and blessed; for the spiritual dealings of God with the souls of men are generally of a quiet nature, easily doubted, laughed at, and despised by those whose hearts prompt them to do so; God's converse with the human spirit is not with thunder but with a still small voice; His most persuasive utterance is a whisper to the conscience, which the noise of the world or the clamour of passions within may easily overpower and render ineffectual; and according to this analogy, I should expect that the blessing which Christ imparted would be nothing palpable, but some more secret grace, the very reality of which might with much plausibility be denied.

But enough of what the blessing was not: it was not a guarantee of salvation; it was not a charm against evil spirits, or a certain preservative from sin; it was not so palpable and open in its

result upon the life and conversation, that its existence could not with any colour be denied; and yet it was a blessing after all, a blessing beyond price, one which those children themselves doubtless felt in after years, that they would not exchange for the wealth of worlds. And if this be so, then we come to this important result, that it is possible to predicate of children that they have received a great spiritual benefit, a benefit which no human words can exaggerate, and yet not to assert anything absurd or anything dangerous. Now let us see how this bears upon the Sacrament of Baptism; in this case we have children presented to Christ, and if the sacrament be of His own appointment and the children come to it by His own invitation, then it seems quite necessary to believe that they receive a blessing from the Lord, a blessing which we may speak of in the broadest terms, which we need not fear to exaggerate by any such language as we can frame, and to assert which need not bring upon us the charge of declaring anything absurdly false, or anything dangerous. For the blessing of Baptism *may* be quite analogous to that which the children in the text received; it is not necessary for my argument that it necessarily *should* be, but certainly there is no reason why it may not be; and in this case we know, that Christ

touched the children and blessed them, and that it would be impious to imagine that He did so in vain; and yet anything which can be said in disparagement of the virtues of Infant Baptism, can be equally said of the virtues of Christ's touch and benediction; it gives no certainty of salvation, it is no charm against the devil, it is no preservative from trial, it is impalpable in its effects, and its influence may be with plausibility denied. What follows then? manifestly this, that we may not apply to the case of Christian Baptism a line of argument, which will not hold good when applied to the similar case of Christ blessing children in the days of His flesh; the mode of His spiritual operation on children *then*, may be entirely analogous to the mode of His operation *now*.

This is a very difficult subject, Christian Brethren, necessarily very difficult; anything must be so, which concerns the manner in which grace is conveyed to our souls by external means. But still the question involved is one of so much importance, one upon which the minds of all of us must be more or less so certainly exercised, that I have thought it worth while, at the risk of being somewhat hard to understand, to point out to you how the Sacrament of Baptism is illustrated by the conduct of our Saviour on earth. And what I desire to maintain is, that whatever

difficulties attach to the view which our Prayer-book takes of the blessings of the Sacrament of Baptism, the same attach to the case of the children whom Christ touched and blessed. And let me say, that there are other passages in our Lord's life which in like manner illustrate for us the grace of sacraments, or generally of means of grace. For instance, if it seem difficult to conceive of the grace of remission of sins being in any way connected with the Holy Communion, as the Prayer-book seems to imply, let us think of such a case as this: in the days of our Lord's life on earth He frequently used these words, "Thy sins are forgiven thee"; now there must have been some connexion between the utterance of these words and the remission; and yet the remission took place in consequence of an act of faith performed before the words were uttered; one might ask in what condition a man was spiritually, who had performed an act of faith which led to his forgiveness, in the interval between the performance of the act and the absolution being pronounced by Christ; forgiven he was not, for the words of Christ were not declaratory merely, but were themselves efficient for pardon, as Himself demonstrated; and yet he must have been in quite a different position from that in which he was before. Now you

may say, that it is useless and dangerous to discuss such points; no one can think so more than I do; I know well how much easier it is to make difficulties than to solve them; and I know also that to the plain humble man there is no difficulty at all; he knows that by faith in Christ he can have his sins forgiven, and he goes to Christ and finds all that his soul needs; but still, if a person finds a difficulty in believing, that certain ordinances can be spiritually efficacious to men's souls, then I think it is right to let him see how much of the difficulty in reality attaches to the spiritual influence of our Lord, when He was personally here on earth. I wish him to see that there is an essential difficulty attaching to all gifts of grace from Christ to ourselves, and that the difficulty is neither increased nor diminished by the fact of the Lord being now at the right hand of God, instead of being in our flesh walking upon earth. I wish him to discover, that whereas there are doctrinal statements in the Prayer-book concerning which he doubts and hesitates, there are statements of the same kind in Scripture, which he passes over without seeing their difficulty. The influence of God's Spirit upon the spirit of a little child is a mysterious thing; it is mysterious even in the case of fullgrown men with all their faculties; "the wind bloweth where it

listeth," said the Lord, "and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit;" it is a mysterious thing that the soul of a man should be so influenced by an unseen spiritual energy as to become a new creature, so that he should be able to say "old things are passed away, behold all things are become new;" but it is still more wonderful, more puzzling, more incomprehensible, if we endeavour to imagine for ourselves the influence of that same Spirit upon the heart of a little child, or if we endeavour to describe precisely the relations which the spirit of a child may possibly bear to the Spirit of God. Yet if we take low unworthy views of this subject, how shall we understand the conduct of the Lord in the text? Hath He not for ever exalted and magnified little children, by laying His hands upon them and blessing them? Was that laying on of hands a form and nothing more? Was that blessing, which His sacred lips spake, a mere expression of kindness and courtesy, or did it not rather partake of that character, which He Himself ascribes to His own words when He says, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away"?

Christian Brethren, I leave these thoughts for your consideration; I am aware of the difficulty

of speaking clearly on such a subject, and will ask you to supply the defect by reading over the text again, and thinking upon it in connexion with what I have said. And now I will conclude with these two remarks: first, let the subject teach us in all ways to reverence the spirit of little children; in our intercourse with them let us try habitually to assign to them that high place, which Christ has given them by making them the subjects of His blessing; let us act towards them with a temper and spirit in accordance with the example which the Lord has given us. And secondly, let us thank God for the revelation which He has given us of Himself in Jesus Christ, according to which the blessings to be distributed to mankind are so free, so universal, that even little children are not excluded, but may have a share in the heavenly gifts; and let us pray God, that we may not in maturer years fall back from the grace, nor discredit the position, which Christ in His mercy gave us in our infancy; let us pray earnestly that the voice, which once said "Suffer this little child to come to Me," may never be heard to utter such withering words as these, "Depart from Me thou cursed one; I know thee not."

SERMON IX.

WHAT IS REQUIRED OF THOSE WHO COME TO
THE LORD'S SUPPER?

REVELATION xxii. 17.

And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

I QUOTE these words, Christian Brethren, because they seem to express in a short space the whole spirit of God's dealings with us His creatures. They represent our Heavenly Father as inviting by His Spirit, and by His Church, all men who *will*, to come and freely drink of the water of life, or living water, which He alone is able to bestow. You will remember that when our Lord sat by the well of Sychar, and talked to the woman of Samaria who came to draw water, He spoke of His power of giving to those who asked Him "living water", as His own

special prerogative; and it is evident that He intended by the figure of *living water*, to express that new life in man's soul which He was able to impart, that principle which having commenced in faith and holiness in this life should bring forth eternal life in the world to come. And the text is quite in accordance with the words of our Lord, representing the Spirit as inviting all men who will to accept of this heavenly gift.

Now it is not my present purpose to say anything concerning the greatness of this heavenly gift; what I wish to point out is the condition upon which it is granted. The only condition is this, "*whosoever will*;" there is absolutely no restriction; whosoever thirsts is invited to drink of the waters, just because he *does* thirst; if a man feels his need, that is his title to ask for succour. Of course the mere fact of a man needing a gift does not render it certain, that he will obtain the gift; but in this case the gift, having been rendered possible by the death of Christ, is offered upon the one simple condition of a man feeling his want and being ready to accept it; and this condition must be fulfilled; God has made us such that we are able to judge for ourselves; we have a will and He does not constrain it; He puts before us great inducements and great threats, but after all the will is unfettered, and he who

says, I *will* not serve God, is not compelled to do so. And every one who will may serve Him; the terms of the Gospel both in the Old Testament and the New are those which are laid down in the text, "Whosoever *will*, let him come freely."

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I call your attention to this characteristic of the Gospel, not because it is new, nor because it requires any argument to establish it, but that I may make this observation, that although men will profess that this is the characteristic of the Gospel, yet they will not in all points act upon their profession. They will allow that the Gospel is free, that God says to all men "Come and drink of the water of life freely," and that when God is pleased to give us such an invitation He means it in its veriest letter; but many persons will not practically allow, that the spirit of such invitation extends to the invitation, which they receive, to come to the Lord's Supper. This is the subject which I wish to treat in this sermon: that it is an important one no person can deny, especially an important one to those, who will not come when they are bidden; and I wish to consider what ground they have to stand upon, who hang back from the Lord's Table. It is an old subject; but it is one which I cannot drop, which I dare not drop, so long as there are persons in

my parish who are invited and will not come. It is a subject also, which cannot in a set discourse be discussed in all its bearings; there may be, in particular cases, peculiar difficulties and misgivings which can best be relieved by private conference with God's Ministers, as recommended in the Book of Common Prayer; all that can be done is to lay down general broad principles, and forasmuch as in this case "the Spirit and the Bride say Come," and as we can find no reason why those who are athirst and are willing should not come and receive God's gifts freely, I wish to examine fairly and plainly what the requisites are, in order that a Christian may with a good and safe conscience come to the Lord's Supper. And though what I shall have to say may be addressed more especially to those, who systematically refuse the Gospel invitation to the holy Feast, yet I believe that it cannot be without advantage to all of us to enter occasionally into those thoughts concerning the Lord's Supper, and the title we have to partake of it, which such a subject as the present must needs bring to our mind.

I will explain the line of reasoning which I am about to adopt. When a man considers with himself, whether he ought to present himself at the Lord's Table, frequently he is beset with a

host of difficulties and questions, as to what is required of him and as to his own fitness. Where shall he go for safe guidance? I reply that he need go no further than the Catechism which he learnt when he was a child; I do not believe that he will find the qualifications of a worthy communicant any where more clearly laid down, or with more authority. And I do protest, Christian Brethren, that when that authorized formulary of the English Church states plainly the conditions which are required, no member of the Church has any right to impose upon either his own conscience or that of his brother any other conditions; yet practically it is evident, that men do impose other conditions, because when a person assigns his reasons for not going to the Lord's Table, they are scarcely ever of this kind, that he cannot satisfy the Prayer-book conditions: the Catechism says that certain things are required, and it implies that no others are required; but when a man makes his excuse, it almost always refers to matters of quite another kind, and thus proves, as I have said, that men do in practice lay other conditions upon their own consciences and those of their brethren, besides those which the Prayer-book has imposed. And I cannot impress upon you too strongly, that no member of the Church has any right to do this; a dissenter

may do it if he will; but as consistent members of the Church, we have no right to teach her Catechism to our children, and then virtually deny its truth by imposing conditions of communion over and above those which she herself lays down.

What then are the conditions? The Catechism sums them up under three heads, which I shall speak upon in order. First, it is required of those who come to the Lord's Supper "to examine themselves, whether they repent them truly of their former sins, steadfastly purposing to lead a new life." Beyond all doubt this must be required, and it is a most reasonable requirement; for to take no higher view of the sacrament than this, we may regard it as a mutual pledge given by Christians to each other, that they will keep the commands of Christ; the early Christians, when accused of meeting together for evil purposes, declared that at their solemn weekly festivals they pledged themselves not to break the laws nor to live in lust and wickedness, and in saying this they referred to the pledge of holy living, which the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper implied. And doubtless, whatever other and deeper meaning the Lord's Supper may have, this it must have; that is, it must be regarded as a pledge of our desire and determination to

live in accordance with the will of Him, whom we then most solemnly recognize as our Lord and King. But what I would wish you to observe is, that the condition of which I am speaking is not something peculiar to the Lord's Supper, but something which is quite necessary whether we come to the Lord's Table or not: the Catechism does not say, "if you would come to the Lord's Table, you must examine yourselves whether you repent; and if you do not care about coming to the Lord's Table, then you need not examine yourselves;" but it only lays down *that* as a necessary condition of coming to the Lord's Table, which every Christian ought to do, nay, which unless a man does he can scarcely be considered to be a Christian. Who will venture to say, that he has no need to repent of his sins, and to make up his mind to live a holy life? and who will say that he ought not to examine himself carefully, as to whether he is doing this or no? No one I am sure will venture to say, "I am not thinking about coming to the Lord's Table, and therefore these questions do not concern me;" every one will feel that it would be the grossest impiety to speak after this fashion; and therefore, as I have said, the Catechism is only laying down as a condition, that which every Christian, without exception, ought to do. You will see the point at which I am aiming; I wish

you to see, that no proper distinction can be drawn between the duties of communicants and non-communicants, but that every one who is worthy of being called a Christian is worthy of coming to the Lord's Table; that the requisites for coming there are identically the same with the requisites for being a Christian in life and reality, and not only in name; and contrariwise, that any one, who declares himself unfit to come to the Lord's Table, does thereby (though he may not intend it) declare himself unfit to be called a Christian at all.

But let me go on to the second thing spoken of in the Catechism as required. It is required, says the Catechism, that those who come to the Lord's Supper should "have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of His death." The meaning and necessity of which requirement appears at once, when you consider the Lord's Supper in the light of a celebration of His death: the Apostle Paul says, "as often as ye eat of this Bread and drink of this Cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death:" the broken bread and the wine poured out do indeed set forth, in a simple yet impressive manner, the broken body and the shed blood of Christ; and he who joins in communion joins in shewing forth Christ's death; but it cannot be merely

as a piece of history, that any man can desire to publish to the world that Jesus Christ died; he must desire to publish it, as a great religious truth, because he feels it to be the great truth which the world ought to know; in fact he cannot care to celebrate Christ's death, unless he can enter entirely into the truth of Christ being the Saviour of the world, and His death the world's life. And if he really believes mankind to have been redeemed from an intolerable bondage by Christ's humbling Himself to death upon the cross, he will find it hard to set bounds to the thankfulness, with which he will regard Christ's redeeming work; and thus a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, and a thankful remembrance of His death, will of necessity belong to him, who comes with a sincere heart to celebrate Christ's death in Christ's own way. But here again I ask, what is there peculiar to a communicant in this? it is true, that this is required of those who come to the Lord's Supper, but is it not also required of those who do not come? can they forget Christ's death without blame, simply because they refuse to celebrate it in His own way? I would admit at once, that every one who says, I have not a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, and I have no thankful remembrance of His death, I feel

no gratitude for what Christ has done and no hope of mercy through Him,—I would admit at once, that every one who said this should keep away from that Feast, which is the very assertion of those feelings which he does not possess; but what Christian will venture to make this plea? who does not feel, that to take such ground is to deny his discipleship altogether? Wherefore this second condition also imposes nothing peculiar upon communicants; but only lays that down as their duty, which is clearly required of every one, who desires to call himself without profanity and without hypocrisy by the holy name of Christ.

Let us pass to the third and last condition. The Catechism tells us, that those who come to the Lord's Supper must "be in charity with all men." Quite a reasonable requirement this, if we remember that the Lord's Supper was regarded from the earliest times as a feast of *love* or *charity*. The holy Eucharistic Feast was never regarded merely as a commemoration of the sacrifice of the cross; it was this indeed, but it was something more, it set forth in the most emphatic manner the unity of the Church, the great truth that all Christians were members of one body of which Christ was the head; and so S. Paul speaks of Christians all "eating of the *one* bread;"

and if the Christians desired to be set forth before the world as a body of men having one head and one heart, they could not be seen to greater advantage than when in commemorating the death of Him, who being rich for our sakes became poor, and by becoming poor levelled all earthly distinctions, and made all men rich who believed in Him, they met together on one common ground, as men who loved each other because they were constrained by the love of Christ, as men who forgave each other their trespasses because God through Christ had forgiven them, as men who honoured one another on account of that common nobility which belonged to them as "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." And this being the spirit of the holy Feast, it is clear, that all envy and malice and ill-feeling and unkindness must be put away by those who attend it: to come to the holy Table without freely forgiving our brother his trespasses against us, and making restitution in whatsoever we may have injured him, without a genuine spirit of love and benevolence for those who are partakers with us of a common salvation, is evidently rank mockery; it is to act the part of Judas, to attend the Feast with a treacherous heart. So that if any one pleads guilty to a want of charity towards his brethren, if he is living on terms of hatred

and malice towards any one, if he is unkindly in his feelings towards the least and humblest of mankind, then I cannot say "Come to the Lord's Table." But who dare make this plea? What Christian would not shudder at it? Whether a man be in attendance at the Lord's Table or not, nay, even if he never intends to take the question of his duty in this respect into his serious consideration, still want of charity is vile, damnable, unchristian. When S. John said, "Little children, love one another," he did not say; "love one another, if you go to the Lord's Table; but if you do not go to it, it is no great matter;" he laid it down as a chief fundamental point of Christian practice, even as our Lord had before. This third requirement of the Catechism then, like the others, lays no new duty upon us; it merely says to us, Such and such things are your duty; if you are not performing it take heed that you do not partake of an ordinance, in which you cannot possibly join without danger and without hypocrisy: it does not imply, and was never meant to imply, that there was a certain catalogue of new duties, which devolved upon a communicant, and from which a non-communicant would be free; on the other hand the whole spirit of the Catechism is this, Are you living in remembrance of your Christian

profession? are you what the Scripture would call awake, or are you asleep? do you mean anything more by saying you are a Christian than this, that you were born in England and not in India, that you can repeat the Apostles' Creed and do not worship Juggernaut? when you speak of Christ as your Lord and Saviour, do the words express the deep convictions of your heart, or are they the mere remnants of nursery or Sunday School teaching? Now if in reply to such questions as these you would reply, "God forbid that my Christian profession should be a lie! I wish to serve Christ, being persuaded that He first loved me, and by redeeming the world from sin and enabling me to become a child of God has laid such obligations upon me as I can never repay"—then the spirit of the Prayer-book would say, Go to the Lord's Table, there seek nearer communion with Him whom you desire to serve, there set forth His death, there join with your fellow-Christians in an act of worship to God and love to each other. This I say is the spirit of the Prayer-book; and again I assert, that as consistent members of the Church we have no right to lay down other terms of communion, than those which in the Catechism we find: there are three conditions laid down, and they are very plain and very simple, and he

who can find in them no obstacle to his coming to the holy sacrament ought to find no obstacle at all: and my design has been to shew you, that those things, which the Catechism says are required of persons who would come to the Lord's Supper, are in reality required of all Christians; no one may venture to demur to them; because, in confessing that he is unfit for the Lord's Supper, he is confessing that he is unworthy to be called a Christian at all. And thus we are brought to this conclusion, that every Christian ought to be a communicant, that a non-communicant Christian is an unchristian Christian, a man who bears a name in the world which here in God's Church he dare not support. What do you think of that conclusion?

Observe, I do not deny, that a person who is in the habit of going to the Lord's Table will probably feel a degree of responsibility, which another may not feel; but then it is one great advantage of the Holy Communion, that it does bring before the mind, in a way which can hardly be neglected, the importance of holiness and godliness; and I do not deny that every communicant has a character to support, and that any fall on his part will be thought more of, will bring greater discredit on religion, than that of a more careless person; but what I do assert

is, that every Christian has his duties, and that they do not become more his duties nor less because he has done what every Christian ought to do, and that it cannot be taken as a palliation of any sin in the eyes of God (whatever it may be before men) that he who committed it had always been careless about religion, had never thought of the Holy Communion, had looked upon his Christian name as a mere mark to distinguish him from his fellows. It can be no palliation of any sin to say, I have committed others, and I never took the means which God in His mercy provided to make me grow in grace.

Do not imagine, Christian Brethren, that I have any very great hopes of such arguments as those which I have now used, producing much effect with those, who have for years past been living in neglect of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. I believe that the arguments are good ones, and that you would have great difficulty in overturning them; but I know also, that those who will come to the water of life are not those whose intellects have been convinced by arguments which they cannot gainsay, so much as those who are *athirst* and those who have the *will*. Yet I think it well that you should see clearly before you what is your duty; and espe-

cially I desire, that no one of you should ever have to say it of me, that I failed in plain expositions of duty, and in declaring as simply as may be the whole counsel of God. And now I would conclude my discourse thus: I have treated the text as an exhortation to the Lord's Supper, it is more obviously perhaps an exhortation to the Supper of the Lamb in Heaven: some of you will not take the invitation in its former sense, but I should conceive that in the latter sense few of you think that you are refusing it—well, God grant that none of you may! but this I would have you to bear in mind, that the qualifications for the one Supper and for the other are the same: those three things, which the Catechism lays down as being required of those who come to the Lord's Supper, are also precisely those things, concerning which a man must be called upon to examine himself, when he is preparing to leave this world and appear before God—repentance, faith, charity; these in brief are the demands, which are made upon those who would come to the Supper of the Lord; which of them can you omit, Christian Brethren, as a requisite for entering heaven? can you go there without repentance? can you go there without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? can it be heaven to you, if your hearts are not warmed with

charity? You see then that there is nothing required of those who come to the Lord's Supper, which is not required of those who are prepared to meet their God: and meet Him we must, there is no choice about *that*; a man need not come to the Lord's Table if he is not prepared, but a man must appear before God, whether he be prepared or no. Think of that; and do you who have hitherto slighted the invitations of your Lord, pray God to give you grace to grieve Him by your neglect no more.

SERMON X.

TRANSIENT IMPRESSIONS.

S. JOHN xvi. 31, 32.

Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?

Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone.

THERE had always been a degree of mystery and reserve in the manner in which Christ our Lord revealed Himself, even to His disciples, before His resurrection. From the people at large He had, as we know, almost completely concealed His real character; He appeared as a preacher of righteousness, a preacher of God's kingdom which He declared to be at hand, as a rebuker of sin, an instructor of the ignorant, a healer of the sick and of all manner of infirmities; and they who had simple hearts and earnest faith, and who compared the works and sayings of Christ with the words of the prophets of old, would be able to detect, in the humble dress of

Jesus of Nazareth, Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write. Nevertheless a veil was thrown over His person, and it was only here one and there one who were able to discern anything of what he really was. And even to His chosen companions the same mysterious reserve was maintained: when Simon Peter confessed Him to be the Christ, our Lord spoke of His confession as embodying a truth which must have been revealed to Him from heaven, and He charged His disciples not to tell any man that He was the Christ. So also when on the Mount He was transfigured in the presence of the three chosen witnesses, and His shining garments and heavenly face gave a momentary view of His really glorious being, these three witnesses were strictly charged not to tell what they had seen until after the resurrection.

Thus there was evidently a systematic hiding of His Godhead, even from His chosen twelve, during our Saviour's life: I am not intending now to explain why this was, but only to note the fact as necessary for understanding the circumstances under which the text was spoken. If you look at the verses before the text, you will find that our Lord had broken through some of His usual reserve; during His latter conversations with His disciple before His crucifixion,

you will find that there is a great deal less of concealment of Himself than there had been during His lifetime, as though He were gradually preparing His Apostles' minds for that full outbreak of His Godhead, which was eventually to be revealed to them.

If you read the verses* which immediately precede the text; you will see in what spirit it was that those words were uttered. You will observe that Christ declared whence He had come and whither He was going, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father:" and the disciples were so struck with this clear declaration, that their hearts were warmed with lively emotion and unwonted faith; they now felt sure of their Master's greatness; they believed that He was come from God; they felt at the moment ready to do and dare all things in His name; they had never, from their first call until now, felt within themselves more clearly the assurance, that they were following one worthy of their faith and love.

But Christ was greater than their hearts and knew all things; His eye saw the coming storm, He knew by what a lowly gate He was about to leave the world, and how different His betrayal

* S. John xvi. 25—30.

and crucifixion were from the bright visions of His return to the Father which filled the Apostles' minds. And Christ knew that the storm which was coming would rock and toss the boat of His Apostles' faith, so as well-nigh to overturn and sink them; therefore He gives them a word or two of warning, "Do ye *now* believe? are your hearts and minds now entirely convinced of My glory, so that you will never allow your faith to be clouded over again by doubts, nor your feet to be shaken in the path in which I lead you? Do ye *now* believe? Alas! you do not know yourselves and your own weakness: the hour is close at hand, when you who now profess such perfect faith, will be scattered hither and thither, and I shall be left alone." This was our Lord's warning, and you know how well the result justified it; almost directly after came Judas and the hired band, and then all the disciples forsook Him and fled; and Peter, the most bold and zealous of all, having followed by stealth, followed only to deny Him thrice. A sad falling away, though only for a time; but one which, if we consider it well, may perhaps be of use by way of example and warning to us Christians of the present day.

I should say that the lesson which the warning of Christ in the text, taken in connexion with

the conduct of His disciples, principally teaches us is this: not to trust in matters concerning our religious state to momentary influences or sudden impressions, but rather to the results of long habits and intimate communion with God and ourselves. I mean that any impression made upon our minds suddenly, by some extraordinary exciting circumstance, by something out of the common way which appeals very strongly to our feelings or imagination, is to be mistrusted; I do not say it is necessarily bad, it may be the means in God's hand for great good; but it must not be leaned upon and trusted in, as those convictions may, which are the result of long religious habit and quiet waiting upon God. I think that if we look at the generality of mankind, we shall find that there is a considerable tendency to act upon a different principle, that is, to trust to what is exciting, moving, stirring, rather than to that which is quiet, unobtrusive, working unseen. I shall take occasion presently to illustrate this by some examples; at present I will say, that this error was precisely that of the Apostles: Christ had been with them constantly for several years, always teaching them, and though veiling to some extent His divine being, yet shewing them enough of His glory to win their adoration and demand their faith. But on the occasion which gave rise

to the text, He spoke more openly than usual, He declared His divine being, and that He was about to return to His Father; the disciples were moved, their minds were excited, their hearts were elated, and they could not fancy that the fervour which they felt would ever cool and die away; but Christ knew them better than they knew themselves, and therefore warned them of the danger of trusting to the warm feelings of a moment as a pledge for future steadfastness in the faith.

Now let me take two or three instances of cases, in which the lesson, which I suppose to be taught by the text, is illustrated and its importance made to appear. The first shall be one of very marked character and not of unfrequent occurrence; it shall be the instance of professions and vows made on a sick-bed, in the supposed prospect of death. Almost every Christian minister will, I should think, in the course of his experience have met with something of this kind: a person who has been thoughtless and careless, or at least not so thoughtful and so earnestly concerned about his spiritual condition as he should be, is brought to greater seriousness respecting his condition by sickness: I do not take the case of a profligate sinner brought low by God's hand, because that will not illustrate my meaning quite

so well; I take the case of a person whose mind, though not abandoned to sin, is not so earnestly set upon holiness and heaven as it ought to be; such an one is laid, we will suppose, upon a sick-bed, and then the folly of laying up treasure where the rust and moth corrupt and of making provision for the body while the soul is left to beggary and hunger, stands forth with a clearness and distinctness which was not seen in the days of strength and activity; the thought of time mis-employed and opportunities wasted and privileges abused then stings the conscience, and if it does not overwhelm with despair, perhaps leads to holy resolutions, and an honest determination, if God should give health and strength again, to devote them to His honour and glory: a person thus grieving over the past and tasting of its bitterness, and fully persuaded of the duty and delight of taking Christ's yoke and learning of Him, will be likely not to suspect his own steadfastness, or to think it possible that his vivid views of duty and his earnest longings to put them in full practice, can ever be wiped from his mind by the return of former health. Nevertheless in no case is a warning more necessary, like that which Christ gave to His disciples in the text, "Do you *now* believe?" and happy is it when the resolutions of sickness are not, like the vows of the

Apostles, scattered to the winds when the excitement of the moment has passed away. Such impressions as I have been speaking of may undoubtedly be turned to good account; they are to be looked upon as messages from God, and are intended to bear fruit: I am only pointing out that they may also easily decay and come to nought, and that unless they be vigorously followed up when health returns, they will be like a dream when one awakes, like the delirium of a fever which has abated, and will leave only condemnation to the subject of them, and sorrow to the hearts of those who love him.

Let us take another instance: a person reads a religious book written in a very exciting style; there is much concerning the blessedness of serving God, the peace and joy unspeakable of faithful service; the book details the life of some one represented as eminent for piety; his faults are perhaps kept out of view, his virtues magnified, his life is pictured as full of holiness, his end described as one of perfect peace. And a person reading such a book becomes enamoured of a religious life, the path seems pleasant, the prize easy to be obtained, and the contemplation of religion in another leads the reader to vows of religion for himself. Or it may be that the book does not contain a life, but is one which paints in

letters of fire the judgment of sin; a striking exposition of God's judgments, an alarm to the careless, an earnest call to repentance; and the reader is struck, and astonished that he never saw things in the same light before, he trembles and thinks what he must do to be saved, and he determines to alter his course and flee from God's wrath. Or it may be that a person hears from the pulpit some emphatic denunciation of a ruling passion or favourite sin; a person heedless and coming to church from habit, or necessity, or vanity, or curiosity, is struck with some pointed word, some dart of the Spirit, some arrow shot at a venture; and he shakes and is alarmed, and says, how dreadful is this place, this is God's house; and he vows that he will come again for worship, and not for the reasons which brought him to church before. Thus an impression is made, which may by God's grace become deep and lasting, and bring forth fruit unto life eternal. Now in all these cases the mind has been affected, the heart touched, the feelings moved; and this first motion of the Spirit should be followed up with diligence, and not be allowed to die away; but there is great danger, lest what has been done suddenly should be destroyed easily, like the seed which fell on stony ground, where there was no depth of earth, and the seed sprang up

quickly, but when the sun rose up it was scorched and withered away. And therefore such a warning as that of our Lord in the text is most valuable in a case like this; "do you *now* believe? now that your mind has been excited and your affections warmed? it is well to believe even now; but take heed, lest, when the rub of actual conflict with evil comes, your emotions shall have passed away, and your faith become dead."

There is one other case which I will mention, in which the warning of Christ concerning momentary influences seems to be applicable. I refer to the resolutions of serving God which earnest people make at solemn seasons; as for instance in Confirmation, the young persons renew their vows, they come in full hope of a blessing, their hearts are joyful in their Redeemer, they feel it a high privilege and unspeakable delight to answer with all their souls that they do ratify and confirm their vows; it is a season of religious joy, and the sunny side of the Christian life glitters and is beautiful, while the hardness of the Christian warfare does not come into very great prominence. Young Christian soldier! do you *now* believe? from your heart you do; but Satan has ten thousand snares for your faith between now and your death, therefore pray God that you may have your faith firm, not now only but when

the lust of the flesh assails, and pride endeavours to blind you, and evil tempers irritate you, and Satan strives to seduce you. The same thing applies to the vows of self-sacrifice and obedience made in the Holy Supper: meet right and our bounden duty it is in perfect faith to devote ourselves then to God, but there is danger lest the warmth of feeling which the solemn service calls forth should freeze and deaden during the secular occupations of the week: therefore may every devout communicant say to himself, while paying his vows and rejoicing to give himself up to Him who died for his sake, Do I *now* believe? God give me grace to believe in His Son, not now only, but henceforth and for evermore!

These instances will be sufficient to illustrate the manner, in which the advice of Christ in the text may be used by persons in our time. The point which I have desired to lay stress upon is, that we cannot safely trust to expressions of our own hearts, or of the hearts of others, when those expressions are called forth by some peculiar excitement or extraordinary stimulus. But do I undervalue any warm emotions or enthusiastic feelings? far from it; they may be turned to the best account, they may be like the electric shock to a body in which animation has been apparently suspended, but which revives under the exciting

influence: but religious emotions, excited feelings, spasmodic expressions of earnest faith, are of no value in themselves; they are only to be prized, when by God's grace they are the springs of a holy and religious life. Therefore I do say, that such feelings are not to be trusted, neither are they particularly to be coveted; but if they exist, they are to be watched with care, and made subservient to our spiritual growth. The Church of Corinth was gifted with very remarkable gifts; they spake with tongues, they prophesied, they had a more than usual share of those exciting influences, which God in His wisdom poured down upon the infant Church; and S. Paul feared lest they should be intoxicated with their spiritual privileges, and esteem more highly than they ought those gifts, which were only valuable so far as they tended to the edification of the Church and the conviction of the unbelieving: therefore he wrote to them that he could shew them a more excellent way, that charity was the great end they should seek, that is, love in all its fulness to God and man; that was the end of their faith, that was the heavenly dress which would clothe them for ever, when miracles had ceased and tongues had died away.

What S. Paul said to the Corinthians may apply in its measure to us; that which God wishes

to have done in each one of us is, not that we should be full of warmth at one time and cold at another,—not that we should be earnest and full of vehement supplication in sickness and the sight of death, and selfish and indifferent in health,—not that we should be moved for the moment (like trees in a sudden gust) by some stirring sermon or affecting story or religious service, and then be all still and lifeless again;—no, this is not what God would have; rather would He have our whole life renewed, animated with a principle of quiet earnest faith, built up with Christian love. If we look at the life of our blessed Lord, we see the picture of uniform quiet well-doing, passive meekness, active love, a life of union with God, of goodwill towards mankind: and his is the most perfect specimen of Christian life, whose conduct in this world the most nearly approaches that heavenly pattern, whose life is not one of feverish fits, hot and cold as external circumstances may influence it, but of continual warmth fed by faith and love.

And indeed, Christian Brethren, I think that all of us are so placed in this world, that we may well lay to heart the need of deepening and strengthening our faith; we may be in smooth water now, but the winds and waves may one

day swell and rise, and then, as in the case of the Apostles on the lake of Galilee, the question will rise, "Where is your faith?" it is not the calm weather that tries whether the ship is tightly built, but the hurricane and the storm; and so it is not spiritual prosperity which tries of what stuff our faith is made, but the day of temptation and adversity. For instance, a man is in ease and comfort, and he blesses God and lives in His fear; but the time may come when God will take away his wealth and make his lot hard, as in the case of the patriarch Job, and then will come the trial whether his faith is firm, and whether he can bless God in adversity. He believes now, will he believe then? Or again, a man is in health and is living as he supposes a life of faith in Christ; but sickness will come sooner or later, and the quiet chamber, and the painful days and weary nights, and the approach of death: will his faith stand then? Or again, a young person is living under a parent's eye, and his ways are watched and he is warned of evil and kept as far as possible in the ways of holiness, and the young person has never had his faith tried and doubts not of its strength: does he *now* believe? God have mercy upon him and keep him in the faith; but soon the trial will come when the parent's

eye is removed and he becomes his own master, and sees evil around him, and is in the midst of bad companions and snares of all kinds; and the question is, will he believe *then*? many have started fairly, and have forsaken Christ and fled when they have seen His enemies near. And so of numberless instances; God only knows how important an application our Saviour's warning may have to each one of us; wherefore I would say, let us look to it well that our faith is deep and well-rooted, like a house built by a wise man on a rock, that we have something more than a name to live while we are dead, that our faith is such as will stand against the storms of this troublesome world, and last until it is lost in the vision of God. And how shall we strengthen and deepen our faith? a wide question, Brethren, and one which would require much time to answer it fully: this only I will say, that faith in God and Christ is best strengthened and supported by doing God's will: he whom Christ likened to a wise man, who built his house on a rock, was he who heard His sayings and did them. That is the key to the whole secret: he who actively does Christ's will, and endeavours to walk in all things as Christ would have him to walk, worshipping Him reverently in all His ordinances, will

by God's grace grow to fulness of faith in Him; so that he will believe not only in the sunshine of Christian life, but also in temptation and trial, the hour of death and the day of judgment, his faith will be living and strong, and he shall live by his faith.

SERMON XI.

THE FOLLY OF UNBELIEF.

PSALM liii. 1, 2.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.

God looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God.

I SUPPOSE that when David wrote these words he was alluding to no imaginary case; that is he was not fancying what men might do, but was speaking of what they actually did, when he described a man as saying in his heart "There is no God." There were Atheists in David's days, practical Atheists at least, as there have been in all days, and probably ever will be; and the general bearing of the Psalm, from which the text is taken, teaches us pretty clearly the judgment which David formed of them. You will observe, that from the expression of the first

verse of the Psalm, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God," David at once goes off into a description of the abominably wicked lives of those who said so; the man who says there is no God is declared by David to be a fool, a man wanting in judgment, in clearness of head, in powers of reasoning; this is an imputation upon his mind, his intellect: but the matter does not rest there, for David does not proceed to deplore the weakness of the Atheist's faculties, but the rottenness of the Atheist's heart; he says they are corrupt, altogether become abominable. And I think it is clear from the tone of the whole Psalm that David concluded, not so much that a man was led by the dimness of his intellect to deny God, and then fell into wickedness and persecution of God's people, and the like, but rather that the man first fell away into evil courses, became corrupt and abominable, did not seek God and so of course did not find Him, went away backward, became filthy, and then finally said in his heart "there is no God." The Atheist therefore, on this supposition, was led to his atheism by no strict process of reasoning, but by a wicked course of life; he was probably brought up to fear God and believe in Him, but temptation got the better of his early principles, he fell away by little and little, and as

he fell further into sin, he trembled at the thought of the God of vengeance of whom in his childhood he had heard; but what shall he do? leave off sinning he cannot, that were too great a sacrifice; the pleasures of sin have thrown such a spell around him, that he is bewitched and cannot draw back; at length a light opens upon his mind, but it is a light such as in swampy places sometimes tempts a traveller from the right way; no light of the sun, no guiding star: and what is the light? it is this, that after all perhaps the vengeance of God against sin is but a cunning fable, an invention of priests, a mere bugbear to frighten children; and to a man who is determined to sin this is right comfortable doctrine; and it is easy to believe true what we wish to be true, and what could a man who has become corrupt and abominable wish to be truer than that there should be no God? And thus the man is led by his sinful life to say, "there is no God!" it is no conclusion of the reason, but the reason of the man given up to wickedness and lust is degraded from its high position, to give a false-hearted and mocking assent to the conclusion of the unreasoning and unruly passions.

Such I think is manifestly the course to the denial of God, as it appeared to David when he wrote the Psalm upon which I am speaking;

yet he does not commence by saying "the sensual man," or "the corrupt man," or "the murderous man," hath said in his heart there is no God, but the *fool* hath said this; and though, as every one must have observed, there is a continual connexion in Holy Scripture between sin and folly, as there is between holiness and wisdom, still there seems to be something intentionally emphatic about the charge against the Atheist in the text; as though the wickedness of a man in saying "there is no God" were lost in the folly of it; as though when David heard a man sneeringly remark that there was no God, he forgot for a moment the man's sensuality and licentiousness in his astonishment at his weakness. And I conceive that there would be something very cutting in the words of the text for *this* reason, that they who take upon themselves to say "there is no God," or in other important matters to deny what good people believe, do uniformly take to themselves the credit of being more clearsighted, wiser, more philosophical than their neighbours; and the last thing they would expect would be this, that a believer would say of them as David did, "It is only the fool who speaks thus." Nothing could, I think, hurt the pride of an unbeliever more than this; and nothing also could be better for him, nothing more likely to shake

him in his proud conclusions, than to find that a man capable of judging, knowing his premises and his conclusions, should not say, this man is a deep speculator and has a great deal to advance in support of his views, but on the other hand should at once break through all his reasonings and come to the conclusion that he is mad.

Now let us for a moment consider the words of the text, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God," with reference merely to the folly of it, without saying one word about the corrupt state of heart which may have led to the conclusion. Of course this is a most extensive subject, and I can only say a few words, which must be most inadequate to put it all before you. Still if the folly be so egregious, it cannot require many words to expose it.

Suppose then a man to say absolutely "there is no God,"—not denying merely a God who presides over the world and punishes the wicked and rewards the just, nor denying merely the God in whom we believe as Christians, but a God altogether; thus going beyond the heathens, as some few profess to have done. Then in this very extreme case the folly is so palpable that all nature seems to protest against it; the question, Who made all these things? confounds such miserable atheism: we are told that the world

is governed by chance, by necessity, or by some such pretended principle; all of them *words* observe, *mere words*; for what *is* chance? what *is* necessity? and how is it possible for any but a fool to separate the ideas of order, regularity, law, such as we see exhibited in the world from the belief in a presiding mind? Indeed this kind of unbelief is so manifestly and monstrously foolish, that I think it may be questioned whether many have really held it; I am sure that you will all account it as the reasoning of the fool, and will contrast it with delight with such words as those of David, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork."

But there is another form of denial of God, which is more reasonable, or at least not so utterly preposterous as that of which I have just now spoken; and this is the denial that God rules and governs the world by just laws, punishing the wicked and rewarding the just; a kind of denial this, which is alluded to in the Psalm, "and yet they say, Tush, God shall not see it." This view also may, I think, without much difficulty, be convicted of folly. For let us consider; is it possible to think of God as being otherwise than perfect? surely not—an imperfect God is no God at all; if perfect, then He must be perfect

in goodness, in holiness, in truth. You can only deny this by saying that there are no such things as goodness, holiness, and truth; but you cannot well say this, because your own heart will testify that you honour a good man, you cannot help it; you respect a man who leads a holy, simple, unselfish life; you hate a falsehearted, lying character, that is, you reverence truth; therefore, unless you overthrow all distinctions in the world, and say that truth and lies are one, that villainy and honesty are one, that licentiousness and purity are one, you cannot deny that there are such things as goodness, as holiness, as truth, which our souls acknowledge to be excellent and reverence accordingly. And if so, must not God be perfect in all such qualities? in fact, is it possible to conceive of such as being anything else than the reflexion of His matchless perfections? You must therefore grant, unless you make yourselves better than God, that God is perfect in goodness and holiness and truth. And if so, is it possible that God should have created this world and established in it a wonderful order of natural things, day and night, summer and winter, and all the other mysteries of His universe, and yet taken no thought about the good and the evil which exist in it? is it possible that He can smile equally on the unholy and the holy, the false

and the true, the murderer and the saint? is it conceivable that S. John and Judas Iscariot should be equally pleasing to their Maker, differing from each other merely as two stones of different colour differ? Surely all this is monstrous; it is not merely contrary to the Bible, or to the inventions of priests, but it is utterly opposed to the plainest dictates of reason: and therefore I am not surprised that where there has been no revelation of God (in the ordinary sense of the term), still not only has God been almost universally believed, but He has been believed to be a just God, one who would not love the guilty; those words of S. Paul in fact speak the universal verdict of mankind, “that he who will come to God must believe that He is,”—and not only so, but “that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” Therefore I find no difficulty in agreeing with the expression of the text, that he who in this way denies God by making Him only the Creator and Preserver, and not the righteous Ruler and Judge, gives evidence thereby of his folly.

There is however one other manner in which a man may deny God. He may allow all that I have contended for hitherto, and may agree with me that it is contrary to sound reason to deny it; but he may still refuse homage to that

God, whom we worship as revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that there are such persons, that there always have been such; and we know that the leaders of such a party have accounted themselves as clear-sighted beyond others, men of great freedom of thought, not slaves to vulgar prejudices, but rather men who have risen above all vulgar prejudices into an atmosphere of their own. Well, men may be wise in their own conceits without being really wise, and it seems very possible that these infidels may after all be of the class of David's fool. If this be so, it will not take long to shew it; for folly consists not in searching deeply into a great body of evidence and coming to a wrong conclusion after all, the wisest man may in some cases do this; but genuine folly consists in missing the truth, when it stands out clear and palpable to every one, who with an honest heart will open his eyes to it. I shall not therefore go into a long discussion of evidences, but shall put two or three simple points before you, from which I think the folly of those who deny God, or rather who deny the Lord Jesus Christ, may appear open and manifest. In the first place it is to be remarked, that most holy and thoughtful men have found in the revelation which God has made to man through the Lord Jesus

Christ the satisfaction of all their spiritual wants; they have wanted peace, and they have found it there; they have wanted high motives to holiness, and they have found them there; they have wanted strength to fight against evil, and they have found the strength they required; they have wanted an example of all that is pure and holy, an image of God in this imperfect world, a light to lighten them, and they have found all this in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, the religion of Christ is the only instrument whereby the human character has been rendered, I will not say perfect, but really admirable and beautiful: there may be apparent exceptions to this statement, but if we take the estimate of excellence which as Christians we are in the habit of forming, if we consider how much we require of a man before we can allow him a high place as a pure and holy man, we shall see I think that the statement is generally true; as indeed we might almost conclude from this, that in our language the name of Christian includes in itself all that is gentle and lovely and of good report. But further, in estimating the reality of the revelation which God has made to us in Jesus Christ, it is necessary to observe the wonderful power that the revelation has had; how it has broken up kingdoms and formed others, how it has reduced whole nations

to its dominion, and then civilized and informed them; how it has unquestionably been the main-spring, the chief mover, of all the history of the world since the time that Christ came: a man must I say take into account all this; he does not come upon Christianity as a new thing, to be unravelled for himself out of the Bible by such ingenuity as he may have, but he sees it as the admitted destroyer of idol-worship, the faith which, as it would admit of no rival, so in all countries where it has once taken root has abolished all rivals. The mustard-tree of Christ's kingdom, which has spread its branches as Christ said it should, has made such a wondrous growth that the only way of accounting for its existence seems to be to believe, that the mustard-seed itself was of God, and that it has been watered by the dews of heaven. And once more, it is to be noted that if Christ be not "the way, the truth, and the life," at least there is no other; either God has revealed Himself in Christ, or He has not revealed Himself at all; for there is no other religion in this world, which any one will pretend to substitute; the rankest infidel will not tell us that the religions of the East are more reasonable, more credible than that of the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore, if Christ be not the revelation of God, we have no revelation

of Him, except the imperfect whisperings of our own minds, and those lessons which nature teaches us. And is this a reasonable belief? When the whole world has been hungering and thirsting after some revelation of God, seeking by all kinds of worship and inquiry of oracles to catch a voice from God more clear and distinct than that which nature affords,—nay, when, in default of articulate utterances from Heaven, men have sought in sorcery and witchcraft and charms for some voice from Hell, is it reasonable I say to believe, that God has never satisfied this earnest longing by giving us any true revelation of Himself? From such cold, sickening, deadening thoughts of God's righteous government, how do those words float like music upon our ears from the mouth of our sacred Lord, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. I will not leave you comfortless. I am the way, the truth, and the life. To the poor the Gospel is preached."

This is a very painful subject to enter upon, Christian Brethren. I must almost ask your pardon for speaking of the denial of your faith in this house of God, where we are met not to doubt or deny, but to fall down and worship and love. Yet as the text has brought the subject before us, I have thought that it may not be without its use to point out to you, how that it may be

made to appear true now, as in the time of David, that it is only the fool, who says "there is no God;" I have thought that this may be useful, because I do not know to what influence you may be exposed, especially the younger amongst you; you may be compelled to mix with, and resist the poison of, those who say there is no God; and if you are, you will almost surely find that they will lay claim to a superior intelligence, will pique themselves on their wisdom, will boast themselves to be above foolish prejudices; and under such circumstances it may be of the utmost advantage to have printed in your minds, in legible characters, the verdict of David, "the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."

I have time to say but one word concerning the second verse of the text in this connexion. David, as I have already observed, passes abruptly from the speech of the fool's heart to the state of his heart: "corrupt are they, and become abominable in their wickedness." What are we to learn from this part of the text? surely this most true and valuable lesson, that the denial of God generally proceeds from the heart more than from the intellect: I do not now enter into particulars; doubtless the faith may sometimes be tried even of those who are holiest and best; but I have no doubt that a great deal of practical denial (at all

events) of God and Christ has come about in this way: a man has indulged his passions, has given way to vice and temptation, has become the slave of his lusts, has got his mind sensualized, and then Satan suggests to him, "perhaps after all there is no God, who cares what kind of life you lead"—a welcome message to such a man, one easily believed true; and then how easy to sneer at the devices of priests, and the paid professors of religion. I do not say that this is so in all cases; for when systematic attempts are made to destroy the faith of mankind, it is not to be wondered at if in some instances the belief of simple men should be disturbed; but depend upon it, the fear of a future judgment, and the wish to get free from the thought of it at any cost, is the root of much unbelief.

But without speculating further concerning the root of unbelief in others, let me say a few words to you, Christian Brethren, concerning your own faith. By God's blessing we have as Christians such a revelation of Himself as at once satisfies our reason and warms our hearts; we see our race fallen in Adam, but reconciled to God in Christ; we recognize as the great spiritual cornerstone of our faith that mystery of godliness, that deep unsearchable mystery, God manifest in the flesh. With this faith firmly fixed in our

minds we need not fear; things present and things to come, all are ours; and therefore it is for us to strive by all means to hold fast this faith; nothing can compensate us for the loss of it; there is no truth in earth or heaven, no philosophy that wit of man has devised, which can by possibility be substituted for it; if we have it, we are rich in a cottage; if we have it not, we are poor though in a palace. Therefore it may well be the earnest desire of our lives ever to hold fast this faith; and sometimes we may think it impossible that it should be shaken; we may have realized all the truths of our religion at some moments so vividly, that we may deem it impossible that ever we should let them slip. And yet doubts and fears do sometimes trouble the mind; the best of men have sometimes felt them; it may be that to experience them is part of our appointed discipline in this world: if then any person should be so tempted and tried, I should remind him of our blessed Lord's promise, "He that will do the will of God shall know of My doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of Myself." You see that our Lord gives an essentially practical rule for strengthening our faith; He does not say, shut yourself up in your study and go carefully through all the evidences and weigh them with an unbiassed mind,—but,

go and do God's will. And so when He heard the Pharisees disbelieving, He did not say, how can ye believe who will not look into evidences?—but, “how can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?” Here was the defect: the Pharisees were well read in the Law, men of acute minds, cultivated intellects: if Christ were the Messiah, why could not they, who were actually looking for Him, recognize His true character? because they were seeking their own glory, seeking honour one of another, and not that which comes of God. What a strange reproof was this to those who piqued themselves upon their wisdom! Christian Brethren, let us learn a lesson from it; let us learn that the true road to a clear sight of our Saviour is by an earnest holy life; here is one mark of the heavenly character of the religion of Christ, that while the wise cannot find it out by their wisdom, the simple and the humble can find it through holiness: if therefore you would have clearer and stronger faith, live more holy, self-denying lives; live more for the honour of God and less for your own; do more for your neighbours and less to please yourselves; bring under your bodies, and bring them into subjection; in fact, realize more and more in your lives, that you are born to do the.

will of God. And surely, Christian Brethren, the fruit of active holiness shall be that which God has promised by His prophet, "then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, 'Here I am.'"

SERMON XII.

CHARACTER OF FELIX.

ACTS xxiv. 24, 25, 26, 27.

And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

THIS is a passage which must be familiar to you all. Felix' convenient season has become quite a common word in our mouths, and I suppose there is scarcely one amongst us to whom Felix has not been held up, either by parents, or ministers, or Sunday-school teachers, as a warning of the danger of putting off till to-morrow what

ought to be done to-day. He is preeminent in fact amongst those unhappy men, who, though they have done little in their lifetime to forward the cause of religion and holiness, have nevertheless been eminent instruments, in spite of themselves, of warning their fellows of the danger of sin and the necessity of fleeing from the wrath to come; even as Lot's wife, though she perished herself by looking back upon Sodom, has been a lesson to all ages of the danger of hankering after forbidden pleasures; and Esau has been a teacher of the sin of selling spiritual privileges for a mess of pottage; and Pharaoh has been a sermon on the awfulness of a hardened heart; and Saul an instance of the manner in which fine capacities for good can be rendered useless by wilfulness and a spirit of rebellion. Thus I say, that Felix, though himself most miserable, miserable even in this world by his subsequent disgrace, and yet having laid up his treasure here and not in heaven, has nevertheless been made, by that good providence of God which brings good out of evil, a standing lesson upon the danger of putting off,—especially in those things which concern our spirits' peace,—of putting off till a convenient season that work which, if ever it is to be done, ought to be done now.

Nevertheless I must remark that, although the

history of Felix is undoubtedly to be regarded in this light, yet it appears to me that the circumstances of his case are not generally rightly understood. Thus I think that when the text speaks of Felix sending away S. Paul, and promising to call for him again when he had a convenient season, it is not to be understood that that convenient season never came; I think that this convenient season *did* come and come again; yea I think that it is the very feature of awfulness about the history, that Felix *had* convenient seasons such as scarce any man else ever had, that he had not the excuse of having no opportunities of warning and repentance, but contrariwise, had the great Apostle of the Gentiles at his bidding, and had interview after interview with him, and heard from those wonderful lips the stern honest denunciation of his sins, and yet never repented: if it had been but once that he had trembled and sent S. Paul away, and the subject of their conversation had never been renewed, then we might have wondered that a man should have been made to tremble and not have been made to repent, but the case would not have been so bad as in matter of fact it was; for the text tells us, that Felix sent for Paul *often* and communed with him; it was no solitary interview, that in which the text tells us that Felix trembled; no,

the same thing happened again and again; Felix thought that Paul would be ransomed, and Felix loved money, and therefore, though he must have hated S. Paul's warning voice, yet he cherished the hope of making gain, and on that account sent often to see him. So that if we were to conclude from the second verse of the text, which speaks so emphatically of "*a convenient season,*" that S. Paul at his first interview reasoned with Felix and made him tremble, and then, being dismissed until a convenient season should occur, was probably never permitted to open the unpleasant subject again, it seems to me that we should miss a great part of the meaning of the story.

What I conceive to be the truth is this. Felix the governor of Judæa was a very depraved man, one to whom S. Paul would have believed it his duty, when opportunity occurred, to speak plainly concerning his vicious life; the Jewess Drusilla was another's wife and was living with him in sin, and his conduct as governor was so infamous and oppressive as afterwards to lead to his disgrace. Now Felix loved money, and knowing that S. Paul had come up to Jerusalem for the express purpose of bringing alms and offerings for his brethren, he looked upon him as one whose captivity might be turned to his own advantage,

by wringing out of him a large ransom for his liberty. It would seem also that Felix had some knowledge of the principles of the religion of the Christians, for he is spoken of as one who "had a more perfect knowledge of that way;" and though he seems never to have thought of becoming a Christian himself, yet he was well satisfied that there was nothing in their doctrine or way of life so dangerous as the ignorant supposed; he knew that they were men who followed peace with all, that the weapons of their warfare were not carnal, and therefore that S. Paul was one who without any danger to his own government might be set at liberty, and if he could persuade him to buy his liberty, so much the better. And here is the first deadly sin of Felix with respect to S. Paul, that although he manifestly considered him an innocent man, insomuch that he gave orders that his prisoner should have his liberty and be allowed to hold intercourse with his acquaintance, yet he was too timid or too covetous to let him go altogether. No, he would keep him in custody, and see to what advantage he could turn his imprisonment: so he sent for Paul, and appears to have treated him kindly, permitting him to speak on the subject which was ever uppermost in the Apostle's mind, namely the faith of Christ. And if S. Paul had confined

himself to matters which did not touch Felix personally, Felix would have listened to him with pleasure; but the doctrine of Christ necessarily brought in the subject of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come,—fearful subjects these for a man who was oppressing the people committed to his charge, who was living in adultery, and who was abusing his own office of judge by holding a man in chains whom in his heart he knew to be innocent. But Felix was not a man to look his sins in the face and forsake them, nor yet was he one of those whose consciences are seared so that they can look at their sins and laugh; he was rather in that middle state which is so very common, in which a man can continue in sin and be alarmed when he thinks of his spiritual state, and yet say like the sluggard, “a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the arms to sleep.” So Felix cut the matter short, by sending his unwelcome monitor away; Paul went and Drusilla remained, and then Felix’ trembling fit was over, and he became himself again. Then again he would send for S. Paul, and hint at the possibility of his restoration to freedom, and tempt him to offer a bribe; but he misunderstood his prisoner’s character; Paul was not a man to make a way for escape, when God’s will did not appear to sanc-

tion him, and therefore again he would introduce the subject of his ministry, and again his reasoning of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come would make Felix send him away in alarm. Still the hope of gain led Felix to send for Paul; when the convenient season would have arrived if it had not been for this, I cannot say; but as it was, I believe that Felix often made it convenient, and often sent his prisoner away, when he heard nothing of a bribe for liberty, and much of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come. And these matters went on until Felix was removed from his post; and being anxious in every way to please the Jews, whom he knew he had injured by his evil government, he sacrificed Paul's liberty to his own advantage and left him in bonds.

So much for the history of Felix' interviews with S. Paul: now, before I make application of the history to ourselves, let me draw your attention especially to these three points. First: note this, that Felix was not a man altogether ignorant of the religion which Paul preached; he is, on the other hand, spoken of as one who had a more perfect knowledge of that way, that is, of the religion of Christ; this you are to bear in mind, in order that you may not attribute his rejection of S. Paul's warnings to an entire igno-

ance of the claims which S. Paul had upon his attention. Secondly: you are to note that Felix' heart was not wholly hardened, his conscience not wholly seared; he was a man who had sinned grievously, who sinned against light and knowledge, and therefore was, so to speak, on the high road to utter hardness and blindness of heart; but he had not arrived at that condition yet— if he had, he would not have trembled when Paul spoke of judgment to come; for this is the strange characteristic of sin, when carried to the extent of producing spiritual blindness and hardness of heart, that those solemn glimpses of an unseen world, those feelings of horror at the thought of the loss of God's favour, become at length like the dreams of infancy, and are regarded as little; but Felix *trembled*,—then his conscience was yet alive,—then he was not absolutely dead, and therefore no one may venture to put away the case of Felix from himself as not coming near him, on the score of Felix being unlike himself, that is, utterly dead to all spiritual impressions. And thirdly: you must remark, that although Felix was not ignorant of the claims of the Gospel, and was not utterly beyond hope as being spiritually dead, still he was able to make the warnings of S. Paul utterly useless; Felix *trembled*, but he did nothing more; he acknowledged the truth of

Paul's words by his present fear and distress, but he gave the lie to his convictions by going on in sin; Felix' mind was disturbed as by the sudden gust of a storm, but there was no abiding impression, no deep lasting effect, and so the storm passed over and he rested in his sins unchanged. And the reason why you are to note this is, that you may see in Felix a proof, that it is possible for a man who has a tolerably perfect knowledge of that way, and whose heart is still susceptible of religious impressions, to render spiritual advantages useless, yea to hear even the words of an Apostle, and still remain without repentance and therefore without holiness.

Now then, Christian Brethren, let me take a more directly personal view of the subject before us; and do you give me your serious attention, whilst I try to point out several ways in which the case of Felix may be an example to us. I have already endeavoured to prevent you from passing by the story as though it had no warning for yourselves, and I would beg of you to search rather for those points which do come home to you, than to dwell upon those which make Felix' case different from your own. For my part, I confess that the history of Felix seems to bring out in a very pointed way much which belongs to the spiritual history of numbers in every

Christian congregation; and when I have brought two or three points before you, I will then take occasion to ask you, whether there be no one amongst yourselves who can find in the history of Felix' mind some touches of the experience of his own.

First, then, is it not a besetting sin of us all to be afraid, or to be too idle, to look into our consciences? to examine our acts, our thoughts, our words, and see whether in each day they have been such as God will approve? is it not in fact the very tendency of fallen man ever to follow the example of his first parents, and hide himself from the searching eye of God? if this were not so, men could not live such unprofitable lives; they must be improving in their spiritual condition; they must be getting free from sinful desires and becoming more holy in their thoughts, approaching more nearly to that state which the Scripture calls *walking with God*. Few of us, comparatively speaking, do as we ought in this respect; serious thoughts of holiness in this world and judgment in another come upon us and are dismissed; at first they make us tremble, we feel their awfulness, but the din of the world deafens us, its sights dazzle us, and we do not act up to our convictions, we do not keep a watch over our hearts and a bridle upon

our lips, and so the convictions become less vivid, and at length perhaps our conscience, like Paul, is left in chains. Now if this be something like the history of many of those who call themselves Christians, and who yet manifest no earnest Christian life, how do such differ from Felix, who heard the warning voice and trembled, but who, because he only trembled and did not act, did not look his sins in the face, did not deal honestly with Paul, did not deal honestly with his own convictions, rendered his warnings useless, and remained in sin?

Again, are there not many who listen weekly to sermons, and in them hear Christ's ministers, as Felix heard S. Paul, "concerning the faith of Christ," who yet are none the better for what they hear? they are covetous, perhaps, and they remain covetous; or they are illtempered, and they remain illtempered; or they are fond of dress, and they remain fond of dress; or they sit in their pews, though compelled by no weakness of body, and listen at their ease to confession and absolution and prayers, instead of kneeling on their knees, and they continue to do so; or they neglect God's ordinance of the Holy Supper, and they continue to neglect it; or they fall short of the right standard of Christian excellence, and the weekly sermons do not move them a step;

and yet they listen, and they sometimes applaud, yea, such grace may be given to God's servants that their words may even cause trembling, when they speak of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come; we may be able to account for this or not, but whether or no, I feel convinced that the fact is as I have said; and if it be so, shall we marvel at Felix, or think the tale not true to human nature, when we read that he too listened time after time to sermons, sermons from an Apostle, sermons which at first made him tremble, but which he contrived so to keep out of his heart of hearts that they left no permanent sting behind them, and at last became mere idle words?

Again, is there nothing Felix-like in the manner in which people very frequently treat those warnings of God, which more clearly than any human words speak of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come? Every one, at least every minister, must have met with instances, in which the subsequent life has in a lamentable manner belied the trembling professions of a sick-bed; I have sometimes heard such declarations of what should be done, if God should be pleased to restore health and strength, that I have thought it right to give warning of the danger of transient impressions, especially when those impressions are

produced by the presence of great bodily weakness, and in the absence of all possible allurements to the vanity and sins of the world; and then I have seen health restored, and carelessness with it, and I have compared with a heavy heart the professions of sickness with the performances of restored health. Now is not this mode of treating God's messenger very like Felix' mode of treating S. Paul, trembling in his presence while that presence brought before his mind a judgment to come, and then when he was present no longer following his own ways? Oh, my Brethren, God knows there is many a Felix in our days who has saddened a minister's heart!

Once more: may we not see in Felix generally a type of want of seriousness in religion? What was Felix' characteristic fault in his intercourse with S. Paul? just this; that he thought it safe to listen to the faith of Christ, yea to send *often* for one who could teach him that faith, and yet not to give his serious attention to the subject. Felix had a knowledge of that way, and seems to have wished to have a more perfect knowledge; he did not forbid Paul to speak upon it, on the contrary he listened to him again and again; and yet all this knowledge and hearing never went below the surface of his heart; it was not a deep stirring of the waters of the pool, shewing

that God's angel was at work in it, but a mere ripple on the surface which soon passed over; no, there was no seriousness in Felix' mind, religion was not to him the life of his soul, he did not ponder Paul's words deeply to see whether he spoke truth or no, he did not examine himself to see whether that trembling which came over him when S. Paul spoke was mere childish weakness or was intended as the beginning of deeper tremblings still: and now I think we have got at the root of Felix' character; it was a character wanting in deep solemn feeling, wanting in judgment as to the value of things, unable to see for more than a transient moment the awfulness of those thoughts, which made him tremble when they were uttered by S. Paul. And if this be so, may we not find a parallel to the character of Felix in many amongst ourselves? nay, Brethren, I will not say who is like him, but who is not like him more or less? who does not find this want of seriousness in religion, this want of an abiding sense of the awfulness of God's presence and of our condition before Him, who does not find this, I say, the great drawback to his soul's growth, the great canker that eats into his health, the great weight which draws him downwards when God and good angels would raise him to heaven? If Felix was a man who trifled with

his more solemn convictions, who did not take that deep abiding view of the importance of religion which he ought, who trembled sometimes but did not tremble always, and yet did not change his trembling into rejoicing in the Lord always, then it seems to me that Felix must for ever be a type of many within the pale of the Christian Church.

In conclusion then, Christian Brethren, I return to the question which I promised to ask; and I ask you whether there is any one among you, who can find in the history and character of Felix some touches of his own religious experience? Is there any one among you who feels constrained to say in his heart, I am like him? Is there any one who trifles with his own conscience, and will not look into it, but dismisses it continually until a convenient season arrives? or is there any whose heart condemns him for having trembled in this place on the Sunday and forgotten his trembling during the week, or for having heard lessons here and never practised them, or for having received in the Church views of religion which the return to the business of life has dissipated and destroyed? or is there any one who is conscious of having made vows to God in trouble and distress, which he has forgotten to pay when the trouble and distress

were gone by? and lastly, is there any one whose heart reproaches him for want of seriousness in his religion, for suffering other gods in his heart besides the true one, for refusing to the Lord Jesus Christ that central place in his thoughts and affections, which His characters of Redeemer, Saviour, Brother, declare of right to belong to Him? Is there *one*? nay, Brethren, do we not all feel ourselves in some way condemned? and if so, shall we not all join in one spirit and say, O Thou! in whom alone our spirits live, give us grace that we may never fall from Thee, but walking in Thy ways with seriousness and worshipping Thee in spirit and truth, may ever “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

SERMON XIII.

(Preached on the 2nd Sunday in Advent.)

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

S. JAMES ii. 26.

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

THE Collect for this day, Christian Brethren, teaches us the manner in which we are to regard Holy Scripture; it teaches us that all the holy Scriptures have been given to us for our instruction, not to be the subject of angry controversies and the storehouse of party weapons, but to make us wise unto salvation; and it teaches us that the true way to profit by God's gift is to read them attentively, comparing one part with another, using (as I conceive) all convenient helps for the right understanding of them, and moreover striving earnestly so to enter into their spirit that we may truly be said to have inwardly

digested them. And I may remark by the way, that this is a very excellent phrase, this of *inwardly digesting*, because the Scriptures are our spiritual food, and he who merely knows the letter of the Scripture, is like a man whose food does not nourish him, whose digestive powers are disordered and whose food therefore gives no support; whereas he who has entered into the spirit of the Scriptures, and received into his heart the mighty truths of redemption and mercy which they contain, has indeed found a food for his soul which will be a real source of support and enable him to live and grow.

Now persons have manifestly not recognized the true use of the Scriptures, when they have exalted one New Testament writer above another, or have maintained that there was opposition between their teaching; and one cannot help feeling surprised that there should ever have lived persons within the Church, who should thus have abused Holy Scripture; nevertheless you must be well aware, at least many of you, that there often has been a kind of war in the Church respecting the sayings of S. Paul and S. James concerning the nature of *faith*; some thinking their doctrines contradictory, and in their zeal for one Apostle saying most unwarrantable things concerning the other, and others again spending much time and

learning in endeavouring to reconcile the teaching of the two. Of course there must be some appearance of contrariety in the writings of the two Apostles to have led to this decision; if the statements of the two had gone clearly side by side, there could have been no controversy raised; and therefore I can well believe that there may be in the minds even of some of you some lurking difficulties on this subject; why should there not, when so many have felt such difficulties before you? I think it well, therefore, to take an opportunity of saying something to you of S. James's doctrine as compared with S. Paul's: if when you read the Epistle of S. James, the thought ever rises in the mind of any of you, "how does this teaching agree with that of the Epistle to the Romans?" then I shall be glad to attempt the answer of such a question honestly and fairly; and the more so, because I am sure that you will understand and appreciate S. Paul better, if you thoroughly recognize the force of the teaching of S. James, and that the comparison of the two will end in the conviction not of their opposition but of their harmony, and will assist you in that profitable study of the Holy Scriptures, for God's assistance in which we have this day prayed.

Of course you cannot expect, nor is it desirable,

that I should give you in the compass of a short sermon an account of all that has been written concerning the subject which we have in hand. All that I shall attempt will be, to give you such general leading thoughts as I have found satisfactory to my own mind; and I think that if I can only put you on the right road and point out the way to a clear solution of the difficulty, you will have no hindrance in coming to the conclusion of the journey by yourselves.

Let me premise, that although for shortness' sake I have read to you only the last verse of the second chapter of S. James as a text, yet I should prefer that you should consider as my text the whole passage commencing at the 14th verse; for it is there that the subject begins, which continues to the end of the chapter. S. James introduces the subject by asking, what profit there can possibly be in a man professing that he has faith and has no works; and I suppose from the fact of his introducing the subject thus, that there were persons who did assert for themselves this kind of faith; and if it be argued that such a notion was founded upon the doctrine of S. Paul, I should not care to deny it, but would at once admit that probably it was; the more so, as such a view of his doctrine would only be parallel to that distortion of his teaching concerning grace

of which he himself speaks, "Let us sin that grace may abound:" I do not say that the notion *was* founded on S. Paul's doctrine, but would admit that probably it was; yet if it was, I am quite sure that S. Paul would repudiate it quite as much as S. James, and that it is not S. Paul whom S. James opposes, but those who caricatured and abused, either ignorantly or else maliciously, the doctrine of faith which S. Paul preached: so far from opposing S. Paul, S. James opposes those who would utterly subvert S. Paul's teaching and evacuate it of its meaning, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and make that faith in Christ, for which the Epistle to the Romans contends so earnestly, instead of a living energetic principle, the merest emptiest sound that ever man's lips uttered. It requires no forced interpretations, no paring down of strong expressions on both sides, to make this appear; no, let the full meaning of each Apostle be brought out in all its breadth and distinctness, the more clearly the better, and it will be seen that so far from S. James being opposed to S. Paul, he is his most valuable interpreter; and the passage of S. James upon which I am speaking, so far from being a difficulty to the Church, may very well be regarded as a most valuable treasure, as being a most clear and firm protest against all who in

any age of the Church may venture to abuse the doctrine of faith in Christ, and so turn God's truth into a lie.

Now let us look at the teaching of S. James; do not let us allow our minds to be troubled with any fears of his teaching being contrary to S. Paul's, but let us take the passage upon which I am speaking in its simple meaning, and see whether it does not contain that which our consciences at once assent to as good and true. He represents a man as boasting of his *faith*, of faith not inclusive of works but as opposed to works, of a faith therefore which must be nothing more than a mere belief in a certain number of propositions; he illustrates this kind of faith by taking a parallel instance from everyday life, he says it is like a man professing to have charity without works, as though a man should say to his poor neighbour, You are hungry and I pity you, you are cold and naked and I am very sensible of your condition. What would the reply of the needy person be but this? If you thus pity me, give me warmth and food and clothing. No, says the man of charity without works, that is not according to my principles, I leave the relief of your wants to others, I content myself with assuring you of my sympathy. This is S. James' method of testing by an ex-

ample in common life the religious theory of those, who spoke of having faith without works; and a very excellent method it is, because if men adopt in religion principles which when paralleled in the affairs of common life are shewn at once to be utterly rotten and absurd, then this is proof positive that however the principles in matters of religion may be disguised, yet in reality they are utterly worthless and false. And it is manifest, that in the case cited, faith in our brother's necessities without active relief of his wants, so far from being charity, so far from being in the most remote sense a virtue, is the very essence of hypocrisy, and the most hateful of all cant. S. James finds an example of such faith in Hell; he tells us that if this be faith, the devils have faith too; if faith without works be the faith which Christians are to cultivate, then the devils are saints; for they believe, it is their very torment that they do, they are fully persuaded that God is merciful, and that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; but this belief brings forth no fruit, they are beyond the pale of God's grace, there is no horror at sin, no striving after holiness, no love of God; no, they are devils still, and their firm belief in God only makes them tremble, because they see in His holiness the assurance of their own misery. Then,

turning from this fruitless faith, which flourishes even in Hell, S. James comments on the opposite kind of faith which Abraham displayed; Abraham was, if ever man was, an instance of faith; the Scripture had said of him, that he believed God, and that his faith was counted to him for righteousness; but a moment's consideration of Abraham's life is sufficient to shew, that his faith was altogether different in kind from that of the man who boasted of his faith without works; for the characteristic of Abraham's faith was just this, that it led him to obey the commands of God in a case where all the feelings of nature had to be sacrificed in order that he might obey. What possible resemblance is there between the faith of a man, who says, I believe in God, and there leaves his faith, and that of Abraham, who said very little concerning his faith, but at the command of God offered up his only son Isaac whom he loved? If you call the faith of these two men by the same name, it is evident that you are describing by one common name things utterly and radically distinct; light and darkness, life and death, are not more different than faith shewn by obedience and love, and faith without works. If therefore S. James found, that any Christians of his time had by any means fallen into this misapprehension of what is meant by

being justified by faith, if he found that men rested for salvation on faith as *distinct* from works, instead of on faith as *including* works, including holiness and renewal of life and hearty serving of God, can we wonder that he should protest against such a monstrous delusion, and strive to bring them to a sounder mind? Do we not feel, that so far from weakening the doctrine of justification by faith, he is contending for its integrity, that he is confounding those who abused it? does not our conscience assent to the conclusion, that faith without works is dead being alone? if it were possible, as I believe it is not, to choose between faith without works and works without faith, do we not see at once by an unerring instinct, that works are to be preferred, as much as the fruit without the root is better than the root without fruit? and do we not entirely assent to S. James' final sentence, that "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"?

So much for the view which S. James has given us of faith and works; a view concerning which we feel inclined to wonder, not so much that any Christian man should ever have stumbled at it, as that ever the doctrine of justification by faith should have been so perverted as to need the correcting doctrine of S. James. Yet men

have frequently fallen into that very quagmire which S. James pointed out, and have ventured to base their hope of salvation through such dead faith, as that of which S. James writes, upon the doctrine of S. Paul. Now therefore let us look for a moment at S. Paul's doctrine; of course I cannot comment upon every passage in which he introduces it, because almost every chapter of his Epistles contains it, but I shall make one or two leading remarks which seem to me to take away all difficulty from the matter.

First, I will observe, that justification by faith is in fact a doctrine belonging of necessity to all true religion, and not to the Christian religion only. This is a truth, which, if it had been borne in mind, would I imagine have saved much controversy: men speak sometimes as though the Gospel had introduced a method of salvation, which is not the completion and perfection of all that went before, but a method utterly opposed to it; as though Abraham and the patriarchs entered heaven by a quite different door from S. Paul and the members of the Christian Church. But the New Testament teaches differently; S. Paul entirely repudiates the notion of his having made void the law by the doctrine of faith; he shews* that the principle which

* Romans iv.

justified Abraham was identical with that which he preached as the principle of *Christian* justification; a conclusion which is confirmed by that Old Testament expression, that "Abraham believed God, and it (that is his *faith*) was counted unto him for righteousness." And in the Epistle to the Hebrews we have a still further development of this view, and there it is shewn at length how that the principle of faith was the one connecting bond which joined together the saints of God in all ages, and was equally to them all the source of spiritual life. But apart from Scripture arguments, it seems to me clear that in the nature of things faith must be the ground of man's justification before God; for I take it, that the misery of man's condition is this, that he sees the purity of God and his own impurity, and his instinct teaches him that his happiness is in being pure, and yet he finds in himself continual tendency to sin. Now if this be so, it seems to me quite plain, that no unaided efforts of his own can bring about that change in his condition which shall give him peace, that is, in the fullest sense of the words he cannot be saved by his works; the most active man cannot lift himself; if a man feel that God is above him and wish to rise and be with God, then he must be sensible that he requires communion with God;

and when once the man has said from his heart, "My God, I am weak and Thou art strong, pity my weakness and clothe me with Thy strength," when once such an aspiration as this has gone from a man's heart, then he has declared that he cannot be saved by his works, but that he seeks justification by faith. If therefore I wanted any independent confirmation of S. Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, I would seek it in the confession of any man whose spiritual consciousness was ever so slightly awakened, and who sought on his knees before God some communication of the divine life; and I am sure that the earnestness with which such a man would implore help from above would sufficiently shew, that no works of man can establish that union with God which is the life of the human soul.

But, secondly, it may be asked, why, if it be manifest that men cannot be justified by their own deeds, S. Paul was so earnest in asserting the doctrine of justification by faith? In the answer to this lies, I think, the explanation of the chief part of the difficulty: it seems to me quite clear, that when S. Paul wrote with so much earnestness, it was not faith itself for which he was contending, so much as faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as opposed to faith shewn in any other way. Take for instance the Epistle to the

Romans, his fullest and most elaborate treatise, and you cannot but be struck at once with this, that its argument is throughout against *Jews*, against men, not who denied the power of faith, but who denied the power of faith in Christ; men who were persuaded that salvation was for the circumcised, and that Christ was not a new and living way: thus, when Abraham is adduced as an instance of faith, it is not with a view to set his faith above his works, as from the language of S. James we may imagine that some wished to do, but to shew that Abraham was not justified in virtue of his circumcision, but in virtue of a faith which he possessed before he received the covenant of circumcision. In fact S. Paul's purpose was, if I may so say, not to preach *faith*, but to preach *Christ*; he desired to represent Jesus Christ as having come into the world to establish a new kingdom, a kingdom to which circumcision and Jewish blood should be no introduction, a kingdom for man as man, a kingdom for all nations and tongues and people, a kingdom of purity, righteousness, holiness; and if you asked the way into this kingdom, he would tell you, You must acknowledge Christ as your King, you must believe that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the Son of God, you must seek the Father through Him; and if he said this, what would it be but

to say, you must be justified by faith? be you Jew or Gentile, it is all one; Christ has knocked down the wall of partition; circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing; there is but one way to God, and that is by faith in Christ. Now if S. Paul preached the way of salvation thus, who shall say that he put faith before works? he never made the comparison at all, he simply pointed to Christ as the way to the Father, and therefore to union with Christ, or faith in Him, as the only conceivable means of bringing forth fruit to the praise and glory of God.

And this view of the subject will remove another difficulty: sometimes fault is found with teachers for laying too great stress on the Sacraments, as though they taught justification by them in opposition to justification by faith in Christ. Thus one of the homilies speaks of being justified by baptism: is this a phrase that need offend us, or in any way clash with the doctrine of S. Paul? if indeed baptism be a merely outward washing, or if it be merely an initiation into a humanly constituted society, then it would be the very depth of superstition to speak as our homily speaks; but if baptism be the divinely-appointed means of union with Christ, if its only signification can be that it is a grafting a new member into Christ's body, and if the conditions

of this entrance into Christ's Church be repentance and faith, then it is not derogatory to S. Paul's doctrine to speak of man as justified in baptism; it is only to assert that Christ's own ordinance is a means of communication with Himself. Or if I should teach a man feeling the burden of sin to seek relief at the Table of the Lord, that is in fact, to seek there that justification, which having received a man has peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, should I be liable to the reproach of preaching justification by other means than by faith in Christ alone? I should indeed, if that sacrament were a ceremony of man; but if it be the divinely-appointed symbol of the presence of Christ in the world, and if the ordinance be entirely emptied of its dignity and its meaning, when it is looked upon otherwise than as setting forth in a divine manner Christ crucified, then to seek Christ there, and through Him to obtain forgiveness of sin and all other benefits of His passion, is to declare in the most emphatic manner that we seek not to be justified by our own deserts, but by the infinite merits of Christ. The fact is, that if we only realize the truth of Jesus Christ being the centre upon which all intercourse between heaven and earth turns, if we see that all our worship and our deeds are good so far as they are informed

by His Spirit and set forth His glory, we shall not think it necessary to hold to one particular phrase, when we speak of being justified by faith. Is Jesus Christ the centre of our religious system? do we apprehend Him as "the way, the truth, and the life"? do we see that there is no way to the Father but by Him? do we ever seek to conform ourselves to His likeness, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit? If so, we need not fear to say, that we receive justification by our works, that we receive justification through Christ's sacraments, or that we are justified by faith only; for we shall be one with Christ, and this it is, however expressed, which gives us of His fulness and saves us from the wrath to come.

On the whole, Christian Brethren, I would say, that if you wish to have your minds clear from difficulty on the point which I have been bringing before you, and if you would see distinctly how S. Paul and S. James, being both Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, did each in his own manner preach the same Gospel to the Church, then you must strive evermore to realize the truth of Jesus Christ being "the way, the truth, and the life." S. Paul did not fear lest men should imagine that they could be saved in their sins by mere profession of belief, because he held that those who had been baptized into Christ had put on

Christ, that they had given themselves up to Him as new born, as alive from the dead, as anxious to bring forth fruit; and how could a man, who had thus received the truth as it is in Jesus, fall into that monstrous doctrine that he had better sin that grace might abound? or how could he talk of his faith without works saving him? So on the other hand, when men had turned the grace of God into an excuse for sin, S. James did not fear that he should detract from the virtues of Christ's death, by asserting that men must do as well as say; for he knew that this was in entire accordance with those words of the Lord, in which He spoke of a man, who should hear His words and not do them, being like a man who built his house upon the sand, and whose house was swept away by the flood. And in like manner we also, if we firmly recognize the truth of God being made man for our sins in the person of Christ, shall not fear to assert the doctrine of justification by faith, while we assent from our hearts to the doctrine of the text, that "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

Finally, Christian Brethren, let me take occasion from this subject to say, that the religion of Christ is a practical thing; it is not a mere profession of faith, it is a life; Jesus Christ came,

not to save us in our sins, nor to save us without effort of our own, but that we might have strength to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. You see this no where more clearly brought out than in the Epistle of S. James: if a man thinks that his being called a Christian will save him, S. James blows such idle belief to the winds; no, it is a life of holiness which God wishes to produce in each of us, and the more we exert ourselves to be holy, the more will He assist us with His Spirit. God has granted us pardon freely, the gift of life is free, no one could have bought it; but God does require of us, that we should not be idle because He has pardoned us freely, but that we should add one virtue to another, and not content with the stature we have attained, be ever stretching forward and striving to grow in grace.

SERMON XIV.

THE GREAT GULPH.

S. LUKE, xvi. 26.

And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulph fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

THERE are considerable difficulties belonging to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, of which this verse forms a portion, and there are several ways of viewing the parable, and correspondingly several lessons which may be learnt from it. But I do not propose at this time to undertake a full discussion of the parable, nor to attempt to deduce all the lessons which may be deduced from it; that would take us far beyond the limits of a sermon: I propose only to take one particular view and draw one particular kind of lesson, not saying that it is the only or even the most important lesson, but feeling that at

any rate it is taught by the parable, and is one which it much concerns our souls' peace to study diligently.

What I wish to bring before you then is the "*great gulph*," of which our Lord speaks in the text, and which, at the time when Abraham is represented as speaking the words, was "*fixed*" between Lazarus and the rich man, a gulph so wide and impassable that communication was impossible, and neither could pass from one side to the other. Now I do not think, that it was our Lord's desire by this parable to make us speculate much concerning the nature of the unseen world; it is quite characteristic of Scripture not to enter into details, or excite our curiosity, concerning the actual manner in which those things shall come to pass, to which in this life we look forward as belonging to the next world; as for instance, in that most extended account of the last judgment which is recorded in S. Matth. xxv., our Lord uses language so manifestly figurative, describing the Son of Man as separating the sheep from the goats, putting the one on the left hand and the other on the right, as to make us feel convinced, that it is the general lesson of the parable, as enforcing the doctrine of a judgment according to works, and not the details of that judgment, upon which our Lord wished us to fix

our minds. So likewise in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, I do not think that our Lord intended to teach us any mysteries concerning the world of spirits; He used phraseology with which His hearers were familiar, when He spoke of Lazarus being carried to Abraham's bosom; He revealed nothing really new, when He spoke of the fire which tormented the rich man, and of the peace which belonged to Lazarus; and therefore, if we propose to ourselves to draw curious doctrines from the parable respecting the condition of the departed, we shall probably fall into grievous error. At the same time we must remember, that the words of the parable are Christ's own words, and therefore doubtless contain important truth, if only we have the wisdom to find that truth; and when He speaks as in the text of a *great gulph fixed* between the rich man and Lazarus, though doubtless He intended not to give us any information concerning the abode of the dead, yet we may certainly conclude that this gulph is something awfully real; and if it be as impassable as the text represents it, then may we consider it to be one worthy use of the parable to call our attention to the existence of this awful gulph, and to make us reflect on the means by which we may secure an abode on Abraham's side of it.

I propose then to say something to you concerning the impassable gulph, of which the text speaks; and in order to do so advantageously, I think it will be well to draw a comparison between the rich man and Lazarus while on earth, in order that we may see more clearly, how there came to be such a wide gulph between them afterwards. Now in your bibles you will find this parable described as that of "the rich *glutton*," but that name does not altogether well describe the rich man's failing: it is true that he fared sumptuously every day, but so probably did David, and so did Solomon; and it is true that while he himself thus fared sumptuously, he does not appear to have taken proper pains to supply the needs of Lazarus: but the rich man's disease was deeper and more widespread than this; and those little circumstances, which are recorded concerning his life, seem to be intended as hints to guide us to the real character, of which we have in the parable only a few indications. I conceive then that in the rich man our Lord intended us to see a picture of one, whose mind was so engrossed by the cares and pleasures of this world, as to forget altogether the things concerning another; our Lord speaks in another place of the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things creeping into a man's heart, and choking the

good seed of God's word; here is an example of this very thing; the pleasure of show and luxury, of faring sumptuously and being clothed in purple and fine linen, had overlaid and choked the good seed of Moses and the prophets; the rich man knew his duty, knew the difference between right and wrong, knew the danger that there was in pleasure and luxury, and the wickedness that there was in hardheartedness and want of love to his brethren, but the purple and fine linen and the pleasures of his sumptuous table hid all these things from his eyes; and the consequence was, that he lived for this world only, he lived like a beast, with no higher purpose than that of filling himself with dainties and covering his poor body with fine garments.

This seems to me to be the kind of character which our Lord would paint for us in the rich man; but here let me observe, that if this be so, it is by no means necessary that a man should be rich, in order that the same character may belong in some measure to him; for if worldly-mindedness, the having the heart set only on the seen and the temporal, the living for the body only, the want of spiritualmindedness, the incapacity of seeing anything beyond this life, if *these* be the features of character which our Lord wished to bring into prominence, then it

signifies not whether it be by riches, or by any other snare of the Devil, that such features are made to appear: it is true that it is the direct effect of money or of the love of money, and of ease and luxury and sloth, to produce such results, and therefore, when our Lord wished to draw for us the picture of a worldlyminded unspiritual man, He represented him as a rich man clothed in purple and fine linen; but I say that there are other things besides purple and fine linen which may bring about a similar result, and a man who has hard work to earn his daily bread, may by that very means be brought to something like the same state of worldliness, as that of the man who fared sumptuously every day. For the question is just this, and it is a question for us all,—are our hearts entirely set upon the things of the body? does our happiness consist in worldly things, or do we see with our souls' inmost eyes, that no purple and fine linen and no sumptuous fare can give the soul of man the same abiding peace and joy as the love of God and the doing good to our fellows? is in fact the fear of God a more motive principle of action with us than the love of the world? if not, then I am sure that whether we recline on the rich man's couch and eat of his dainties, or whether we lie at his gate full of sores and asking for

the crumbs of his table, it is all one so far as concerns our spiritual condition; we are yet of the earth earthly, we are yet carnal and sensual.

If then this be the kind of character which our Lord wished us to see in the picture of the rich man, what does Lazarus represent to us? he is described as a very poor man, a beggar, one in great need and bodily suffering; and I have no doubt that our Lord represented him thus, because there was a great tendency in His time to look down upon the poor; and it has been remarked, that whereas our Lord gives us no name for the rich man, He does give us the name of the beggar, as though to shew that in His kingdom worldly rules are reversed, that whereas we know the names of the great and powerful, and think comparatively little of the names of the poor, with Him it is the humble and the simple whose names appear specially worthy of record. Nevertheless, as it was not merely the rich man's wealth which our Lord wished to point out to us for our avoidance, but that worldly spirit of mind which his riches produced, so here in the case of Lazarus, it is not merely his poverty and his sufferings, which are to account for the difference between his destiny and that of the other, but rather the spirit which his sufferings wrought in him and the manner in which he

bore them. It is true that our Lord does not enter into any explanation on this head, but I think you will see at once that He intended to draw in Lazarus a picture of one, who was softened by suffering and made to see that this was not his rest, and who was able therefore to be cheerful under God's affliction and to believe that all things worked together for his good. And if this be so, then you will see that the character which Lazarus exhibited may be exhibited by each of us whether rich or poor; for he who uses this world as not abusing it, who feels that there is something more serious and solemn in this life than mere pleasure, who feels that the vanity of this life, of which Solomon complained, can only be neutralized by strong earnest hopes of an inheritance undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens,—that man, I say, whether rich or poor, has realized the state of mind which want and pain wrought in Lazarus. And as wealth rightly used does not hinder this state of mind, so poverty does not necessarily ensure it; nay, poverty does very often produce the directly opposite effect, making a man fix all his heart and his energies on his daily bread, and encouraging him to think that there is abundance of excuse for him if he neglect religion; and I have often grieved over the utterly carnal un-

spiritual mind, which has been engendered in a man, not because he has been tempted by luxury, but because he has had his heart set only on the daily bread which perishes, and not on that bread which cometh down from Heaven, which a man may eat and live for ever. In few words, the contrast in the parable is not between riches and poverty, so much as between irreligion and religion, between worldliness and spirituality, between the mind set upon things seen and temporal and the heart set upon things unseen and eternal.

Now, having endeavoured to draw as clearly as I can the real distinction between the two persons of whom the parable speaks, let us look to the contrast between their condition when this life had come to an end and the other life commenced. Lazarus we read died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; an expression by which (as I have before observed) our Lord does not appear to give us any particular insight into the condition of spirits departed, but only adopts a common phrase to express that Lazarus had gone to those painless regions, where the spirits of just men await the final doom of all things: whatever may be the immediate condition of departed souls the lesson of our Lord's parable is the same, and therefore I think it is not wise

to lay any particular stress upon the manner in which He has described this condition; the great point is, that Lazarus rested from his labours having died in the Lord, and that the rich man rested not. Of the rich man we read that he died and was *buried*; Lazarus' burial was not mentioned, he might have been utterly neglected and never buried at all, but the rich man died and was *buried*,—oh yes—there was a stately funeral, and weeping friends, and those five brethren who changed their purple and fine linen for the nonce into the dark robes of mourners, and there was all the solemnity which outward appliances can give to the burial of the dead; but there was not that which Lazarus had, and which was worth far more than all the pomp of the rich man's funeral, there were no angels to carry him to Abraham's bosom. Thus Lazarus died and was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom, and the rich man died and was buried; an awful contrast, and one which describes, with something like a solemn irony, the difference between the end of him who has his portion in this life and that of him who has his portion in the next: for the man who has lived for God, whose soul is united to Him the father of spirits, may be truly said to be carried away of angels; for though his body is buried, yet it was never

his mere body that he accounted to be truly himself, and therefore when his body decays yet he himself liveth through the power of Christ for evermore; but he who lives for this world, whose spiritual life is extinguished (as it were) because the body and the body's wants have ever been his principal end, he dies at length and is *buried*; that body for which he cared so much, toiled so much, that body which he counted to be himself, forgetting that he was a spirit which should live for evermore, that body is buried, and with it all his hopes and cares go to the grave too.

This then is the contrast between the ends of these two men; and now I wish to call your attention to that lasting distinction between their conditions, which the text brings before us. Abraham says, that between the rich man and Lazarus a great gulph was fixed, so that none could pass from one side to the other; a *great gulph fixed*; observe, it is no slight interval, no trifling difference, but it is a chasm, a gulph, and a wide one; and moreover it is *fixed*, the word in the original Greek is quite as strong in its meaning as that which our English Version has given, perhaps stronger; it means that this gulph or chasm has been firmly and durably established, that it is no slight or accidental distinction which

it may be hoped that time will blot out, but that it is a deep wide gap, which no reasoning can hide and no time can ever heal. Now I think it most necessary, that as this is our Saviour's own description, we should take His words in all the fulness of their meaning, of course not straining them beyond their intention, but also not cutting off from them any of their strength: I admit that they are awful words, I admit that the very thought of the possibility of an impassable gulph being ever fixed between ourselves and God, is a thought full of the most frightful horror; nevertheless our Lord spake such words in love, and it is only wise and pious in us to receive our Lord's words thoughtfully and strive to turn them to good account.

What I conceive then that our Lord asserts in the text is this, that there is a great impassable gulph fixed between the spiritual condition of those whom He represents by the rich man, and those whom He represents by Lazarus: and I have endeavoured to make clear what was the difference between these two men in this life, in order that we might be able to account for the difference between them in the other; the great gulph is not between the rich and the poor, not between those who have been favoured by God in this life and those who have been chastened

by Him, but it is between those who have so used this world as to starve their spirits, those who have fixed their eyes so firmly on the things of time and sense that they could not see the realities of a future world, those who have become carnal and sensualized because they must needs give all their efforts to feed their bodies and have been content to leave their souls uncared for, those who have heard the sound of the Gospel and have been taught the condescension of God in Christ, and how He became poor that they might be rich, and how He denied Himself that they might lack nothing, and these things have been to them as idle tales, as music to the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears,—the great gulph is, I say, fixed between such as these, and those who have lived in this world as not abusing it, knowing that the fashion of it passeth away, those who have lived not by sight but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But who fixed this gulph? surely not the Father who would not the death of a sinner, nor the Son who redeemed us from the curse, nor the Holy Spirit who sanctifies God's elect; no, it was the rich man himself who fixed it there! to what purpose was his life given him, but that he might make himself fit for Heaven? to what purpose had he Moses and the Prophets, but to warn him of the

duty of loving God and his neighbour, and ever living in the fear of God? and he had neglected all these things, year after year had passed away and found him still no better, still faring sumptuously, still dressed in purple, but his soul as starved and naked as ever, and every year had more and more widened the gulph and fixed it more firmly; and so when he woke up in another world, he only reaped the fruit of the things done in the body, and the gulph was fixed indeed, but fixed by his own labours before he died and was buried.

And without pretending to go into the deep mystery of the other world, yet this at least is enough to shew us the greatness of the gulph and why it is so firmly fixed: the joys of heaven are spiritual, there is no pleasure there for a man who has no fear of God, no pleasure in obeying Him; and therefore he, who by a long course of carelessness and self-indulgence and neglect of God and neglect of his duties, has hardened his soul and rendered himself incapable of any but the grossest pleasures of the body, has thereby himself put a gulph between Heaven and him; he has an opportunity of fitting himself for Heaven, and he has neglected it; he has acted as though he had no spirit, and so his body has become his god; therefore, if when the end comes he finds

that Heaven has no joys for him, who has fixed the gulph but himself? and who can remove it, when the time expressly given for preparation is gone, and the time of judgment is at hand? And oh, what a wide gulph must it be, when it is the result not of a single act, but of a whole life abused, a whole life spent in the service of the flesh instead of being consecrated to God!

Oh, Christian Brethren, it is a fearful thing to think upon that which the text brings before our mind! I am quite certain that men do not in general fully realize the awful breadth of the gulph, nor the firmness with which it is fixed; and they often try to persuade themselves, that God is so merciful that in some way that gulph will be bridged over: but what if the gulph be not of God's making but their own? what if the gulph be growing wider and wider, while they are wasting their time instead of working out their salvation? It is not for me, nor for any man, to judge of the breadth of the gulph which will lie between any one man and God; but it is for me to assert, that it is possible so to forget God in this life, so to smother the soul beneath worldliness and sensuality, as to fix an impassable gulph between the soul and God. And the mere possibility of this should make all of us ask ourselves earnestly and with trembling, how

far we are improving our opportunities; this is the seed-time of a long existence, and he who does not sow good seed, or having sown it does not water it and weed it, may not complain if his crop fail in the end. And we, Brethren, have all our opportunities of serving God, and acting in His fear, and training our spirits in love to Him and love to our brethren; the rich man had but Moses and the Prophets, but we have the revelation of God in our Lord Jesus Christ, we have such knowledge of Him and of His ways, and such means of being strengthened by Him, as the men of old time never had nor could have; therefore let us thank God for our advantages and strive to improve them, ever remembering that of those to whom much is given much also will be required, and that if the gulph be not closed it will yawn all the wider, and be more firmly fixed, on account of privileges abused. And remember, Christian Brethren, that in all your actions you are working for eternity, that you are now forming a character which must last for evermore, and that if you live not *for* God in this life, you cannot live *with* Him in another; look well then to all you think, or do, or say; and pray God that His Spirit may so transform your hearts in this world, that your souls may be fitted for those spiritual joys which are at His right hand for evermore.

SERMON XV.

THE TEN LEPERS.

S. LUKE xvii. 17, 18.

Jesus said, "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?"

"There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger."

THESE are the words in which our blessed Lord expressed His astonishment, when He found that out of ten men whom He had cleansed from leprosy, one only, and he an almost heathen, returned to give thanks to God. We read, that as Jesus went up to Jerusalem through Galilee and Samaria, ten men met Him, and being afflicted with that dreadful disease called leprosy they stood afar off, for they were forbidden to come near those who were pure; but still they were able to make their case known to the Saviour though they might not come near Him, for they lifted up their voices, and said, "Jesus, Master,

have mercy upon us." They had heard of Christ's miracles, perhaps had seen some of them, and they had faith enough to pray to Him to assist them also in their deep distress. And our Lord at once heard their prayer, but He answered it in such a way as to give occasion for some further exercise of their faith; He did not heal them at once, but told them to go and shew themselves to the Priests: now this was a thing commanded in the law to be done by men who had been cleansed, and therefore these men, if they had not had confidence in our Lord's will and power to heal, might have said, "Nay! cleanse us first, and then we will go and shew ourselves." But they said not thus; they put faith in Christ and went at once as He had told them, and as they went they were cleansed; in the act of obedience to Him they received the reward of obedience, even the cure of their leprosy; in shewing out their faith by their works, their faith saved them.

So far the conduct of these lepers is all that we could desire; they were bold in their application for mercy, they were ready in their obedience, when they had been told the way of being healed. But here the scene changes; the ten part company; one of them, as soon as he saw that he was cleansed, at once returned thanks to God for what was done in him—but only one; nine

out of ten went on their way, and thought it not needful to return and glorify God. And that one, S. Luke tells us, was a Samaritan, one of that half-heathen people whom the Jews despised, and whom his nine companions would have scorned to consort with, had not their fearful sickness made them forget all points of difference and fixed their minds only on their common pollution. And this it was that made our Lord marvel; that ten men should have been cleansed from a disease, compared with which death would have been regarded as a small evil, a disease which in its worst form was foul and loathsome beyond words to describe, which made a man an outcast from society, a burden to himself, a recognized type of the spiritual pollution of sin,—that ten men should have been suddenly cured as they walked of such a disease as this, and that one only, and he the least instructed of the number, should have thought it worth while to offer thanks for his cure; this was the wonder, this it was which made our blessed Lord exclaim in the words of the text, “Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God save this stranger.”

Now without going any deeper into the history, Christian Brethren, without inquiring particularly why these nine lepers would not return thanks,

and without discussing the blessing which they lost by their ingratitude, I would say that there is much in the ingratitude of the nine and the gratitude of the one to warn and teach us. For we, as baptized members of Christ's Church, are peculiarly in the position typified by the lepers who were cleansed; Christ said to them all, "Go shew yourselves to the Priests;" He made no difference between them; but seeing that they were all in one common disease, He put them all in one common road to health; they did not all reach the perfection of blessing, only one obtained the prize of those gracious words, "thy faith hath made thee whole;" but that was the fault of the lepers, not of their Saviour; He had put them in the way, He had granted to them all the germ, the seed, of life, and it was for them to water the precious seed and bring it up to perfection. And so these men are apt types of us who are all baptized into the Church of Christ, and who receive once for all the heavenly washing whereby the pollution of our leprosy is cleansed, and the seed of everlasting life sown. All of us have been cleansed, even as all those ten lepers who came to Christ were cleansed as they went to the Priests; and therefore, as we may see in these ten cleansed lepers a type of ourselves all once cleansed from sin, so it is worthy

of our deepest attention to examine, whether there be not a further analogy, whether the nine ungrateful ones, who did not return to give thanks to God, may not also among us find too clear and distinct a parallel.

And indeed, whatever be our practice, certainly the duty of returning thanks to God for benefits received is one of the first and clearest. Creatures as we are of His hand, sustained in being by the breath of His power, fed and clothed by His bounty, and beyond all this blessed with unmeasured spiritual blessings, we owe Him such a debt of gratitude as no efforts of ours can pay. Are we not bought with a price, Brethren, and that an unspeakable price? have we not been healed of the leprosy, which was upon us when our mothers bore us? have we not been taught the way of life, and earnestly exhorted to avoid the way of death? have we not communion with Heaven through the Holy Spirit of God, and the bread of God to feed our souls in the wilderness? These are themes of thankfulness; and if we thought as we should, we should meditate with full hearts on the blessings we have received, and begin to practise on earth those hymns of praise which we shall have to sing in Heaven. Surely if any voice in the creation should be loud and earnest in the praise of God, it should be that

of a sinner redeemed, a human soul saved from the power of Satan and new created for the dwellingplace of God, a creature of infinite capacity for suffering rescued from the unutterable darkness of the abyss and made a citizen of Heaven.

But so is it not in fact; strange though it may seem, we lepers who have been cleansed by Christ do not return and with one voice glorify God; for one who returns to give thanks, nine go on heedlessly and forget this great act of duty: and that I may impress this melancholy fact upon you and make you see its shamefulness, I shall point out to you several instances, in which men exemplify by their conduct the thankless spirit of the nine lepers; some of these instances, it may be, will find no one present who can say "that applies to me," but some I think will strike many as applicable to themselves: I would that my remarks might by God's blessing go to the heart of such, and stir them up to greater thankfulness to God for all the benefits He has shewed them.

And first, as a great broad fact, illustrative of the parallel which I wish to draw between the thankless lepers and the men of our time, let me call your attention to the small number of those who come to praise God in church. I

do not speak of this parish in particular, though certainly we also are liable to blame on the same score; but I speak of the state of things in general, as they exist in a country like this, where the worship of God is attended to perhaps as much as in any country. Consider then the number of those who are brought to be presented to God in baptism; many of them perhaps are afterwards little cared for, badly brought up, neglected, exposed to bad example, perhaps even led by their parents into wickedness and sin; and if such as these grow up to love the ways of unholiness rather than the ways of God, we cannot wonder much; God be merciful unto them! but there are very very many, who are brought up with the most solicitous care, who have good advice, good example, good schools provided for them, and every thing done, which can be done, to keep them in the right way; and so long as they are obliged to obey, or at all events so long as the influence of early habits lasts, such young persons frequent God's house: but they grow up, and what becomes of them? they do not come here to return thanks to God, they go for the most part about their own pleasure, or waste God's holy day; or whatever they do, the greater part do not come here. This is a sad fact, but it *is* a fact; those who come here to

give thanks are but as one, compared with the nine who go their ways. And one would imagine too, that all of us receive sufficient mercies during the six days of the week, to make it our pleasure as well as our duty to come and return thanks on the seventh; but somehow men do not argue thus, some make no pretence except their own stubborn wills, and others satisfy themselves with frivolous pretexts, and the result is that but one in ten comes to return thanks. It might perhaps give us satisfaction to see that so many of our churches are nearly filled, if the question did not come home to us at once, "but where are the nine?" It was a pleasant sight, doubtless, to see the poor Samaritan return and give thanks to God, yet the first thought was not concerning his gratitude, but concerning the fearful want of gratitude in the rest; "were there not ten cleansed?" and so, Brethren, it is a sickening thought, that out of all those who have been received into Christ's Church and instructed in the way of life, and moreover have received benefits innumerable from the hand of God, but one in ten returns to give thanks. "Where are the nine?" alas, alas! where are they?

Again, God frequently sends a warning voice by sickness to those who need such warning; and while the sickness is heavy and the grave in sight

and judgment expected, men cry out all with one voice, "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us!" and you would think that if health were given but once more, the lives of those who had thus been redeemed from Hell would be one solemn hymn of praise to the Deliverer. But he who should expect thus would find himself mistaken; it is a mournful fact, that men who have thus been even at death's door, and have by God's mercy been spared, and allowed once more to rejoice in the light of the living, for the most part forget their vows and walk on still as before; here and there you may find one, whose heart is changed by what he has seen and felt, and who falls down on his face and gives thanks, and devotes the remainder of his days as a thank-offering to God; but "where are the nine?" where are all those who have cried out in their trouble, "Lord, help me!" every one is ready with this cry; let a man be never so abandoned and careless, when affliction is heavy upon him he will cry earnestly for mercy, and he who has never prayed before will generally pray in some sort then; but health returns, the man forgets the leprosy that was upon him, and consequently forgets to give thanks for the mercies vouchsafed and to shew forth his thankfulness to God; and so it comes to pass, that for

one who is permanently made better by affliction, nine go on as before.

Again, we find some who are ready to give their time, their substance, their labour, to the service of God and to active charity among their neighbours; we find some, who, conscious of the grace they have received through Christ and the miracle which has been wrought upon them in their conversion from Satan to God, are willing to do something in return, though it be but little, for Him who has done so much for them; and it is a cheering thought, that in this world of selfishness such persons are to be found: but then the thought strikes us, are these all that have been cleansed? these are contributing something to the honour of their Master, but where are those others so much more numerous than these, who were as leprous as they and who like them have been cleansed? Few have been found who have returned to give glory to God; but one in ten, here one and there one; the greater number of professing Christian men, men professing to have been healed of sin, are manifestly dedicating their time and their talents and their goods to themselves; and though they were once loathsome lepers and rejoice in having been healed, they do not with their lips and their lives return glory to God.

Or once more, of those who come to this holy house of prayer, and by their coming profess themselves earnest disciples of Christ, how few are there who come to the Holy Table! It is indeed a thing to cheer a minister's heart and make him trust that the Lord is in the place, to be permitted to join Sunday after Sunday with even a small number of those who are willing to obey their Lord, and God be thanked that there are as many as there are amongst ourselves who reckon it a privilege thus to join in holy communion; nevertheless when one compares the number of those who come with the number of those who stay away, the thought at once arises, "were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" it is pleasant to see these who are here, but are these all the lepers who have been cleansed? what do men mean by coming to church and confessing their sins and asking for forgiveness, if they are to go on for ever in the old road of carelessness and indifference, and never intend to live any higher life? I verily believe that a man who has any sufficient sense of the leprosy which has been upon him, and of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, who has provided a remedy for that leprosy and shewed him how he may be healed,—I believe that a man who at all enters into the spirit of those

words which he continually uses, when he says that there is no health in him, that is, that in himself he is sickly and leprous, and who at the same time realizes the truth that pardon and peace may be had through Christ, yea, that he himself of God's infinite mercy has once been washed from the pollution of his birth,—I believe that any man, who has realized all this, will be unable to refuse to join in the solemn offering of praise and thanksgiving, which is made in the celebration of Christ's death.

Alas! Brethren, whichever way we look at this subject the view is melancholy; ingratitude seems to be the rule of mankind, gratitude the exception; for one who glorifies God there are nine who forget Him; for one who comes to church there are nine who stay away; for one who is sanctified by sickness there are nine who are hardened by it; for one who gives himself to works of charity and who lives in some measure to the praise of God, there are nine who live to themselves; and for one who partakes devoutly of the Holy Supper, there are nine who follow their own way, and refuse to come. So that in these and many other instances, we find that the conduct of the lepers who were cleansed is but a type of sinners in general; there is one who falls down and gives thanks, and who receives

the gracious words, "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole!" and angels rejoice over this sinner saved; but "where are the nine?" there were others cleansed beside him, others who received the same first message of mercy as he, and where are they? gone perhaps one to his farm and another to his merchandize, and all determined to forget their leprosy and persuade themselves that they are healed and that all is well. But, Christian Brethren, all is *not* well; that leprosy will break out again; and he who does not return and give thanks to God and devote himself to God's service, will find, that the disease is still upon him, and that it will shew itself in a world where there is no Jesus to have mercy and no more offering for sin.

SERMON XVI.

S. PAUL'S VIEW OF LIFE.

PHILIPPIANS i. 22, 23, 24, 25.

But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour :
yet what I shall choose I wot not.

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart,
and to be with Christ ; which is far better.

Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and con-
tinue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.

WHEN S. Paul says "this is the fruit of my labour," he seems to refer to what he had said two verses before, namely, that it was his earnest expectation and hope, that he might never be ashamed of Christ, but that Christ might be magnified in his body, whether he lived to preach the Gospel, or died to prove his sincerity. This he represents as the one fruit of all his efforts, the end and aim of his life, to set forth the glory of Christ, to make men see that He really was what S. Paul believed Him to be, the one Mediator

between God and man, the Saviour, the Redeemer of mankind. And S. Paul could not be afraid of being accused of vainglory when he said this, partly because by doing so he was pledging himself to a life of endless toil and persecution, but chiefly because it was manifest that he said no more than the truth; right or wrong, it was clear that the name and honour of Jesus of Nazareth were the moving principles of the Apostle's whole life: people might think him mad, some did so, but as to his having any other end in life than this, namely, to make men love and honour Christ, it was folly to hint at such a charge. For what was the fact? a young Jew, of high talents, well brought up, with every personal advantage, with the dignity of a Roman citizen, backed by the power of the Jewish Church, sets himself to uproot the new religion of Jesus Christ; on a sudden he changes his life, he says that he has seen a light and heard a voice which tells him to change, but anyhow he does change and begins to build up the faith which he destroyed: and now when he has embraced this new faith and examined it, he finds that it meets all his wants; it leaves no gap in his heart unsupplied; he finds that it has at once that depth and simplicity which divine things have, it is so simple that it can be received by the ignorant, it is so deep that he

finds for his own powerful mind depths which he cannot fathom; and he is not contented with merely making known his adhesion to the new faith, he feels that he has a mission to spread it, and to this work he devotes his life. And a wonderful devotion it was; we are so familiar with it, that it scarcely strikes us so vividly as it might; but indeed I think, that, apart from the debt of gratitude which we ourselves owe, no figure in history stands out more remarkably, as that of a man giving the whole energies of his mind to the assertion of a great truth, than does that of S. Paul. And I say that the end of S. Paul's life was so patent and palpable, that no one would accuse him of vanity or boasting, when he said that the fruit of his labour was the magnifying of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now you will notice, that in the text S. Paul speaks as though he had a choice between continuing his life here and changing it for another and a better. He says, "what I shall choose I wot not: for I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." It would seem from this, that the choice between life and death had been given to S. Paul; and of course it is not right for us to limit by our own experience the

communion with the spiritual world which may have been granted to an Apostle: S. Paul speaks of being transported into heaven, and of abundance of revelations which were made to him, and this being so, I should shrink from interpreting according to our own contracted notions, words which he may have used in a more mysterious sense; nevertheless it may be, that S. Paul intended to express rather what was his own desire than what was in his own power, and even if this were all that he intended there would be quite enough for the purpose which I have now in hand: for what I wish to bring before you is S. Paul's estimate of life and death, and the reasons why he desired the one and the other. I wish to bring this before you, because I am sure that it is a subject of deep practical importance to us all. Here we are all now in life,—what are we living for? why do we desire to live? At the same time, we may all die this night,—why do we fear to die? or what reasons are there for even desiring death? To creatures like ourselves, who have the power of reflecting upon our actions, who feel that life must have been given to us for some other reason than that for which it has been given to the butterfly, and who feel that death must have for us a deeper and more awful meaning than for other creatures it can have, such

questions as these are the very most important questions that we can ask. Therefore I desire that we should avail ourselves of the experience of S. Paul as detailed in the text; he, on his own account, balanced the question between life and death, and it is the result of his examination which I desire to bring out before you, and offer for your own consideration and for the guidance of your own judgment.

In the text, then, S. Paul appears to weigh his life, being such as I have already described it, against departing and being with Christ. He says plainly, that he has "a desire to depart"; you might imagine that this life was intolerably burdensome, that he desired only rest and cessation from labour, but this would not be doing justice to the Apostle; the characteristic of his life was joy in the Lord, he ever inculcated the lesson of "rejoicing in the Lord always," he speaks of having "peace in believing"; it is impossible to read his writings without perceiving that whatever might be his external troubles, yet he had a secret spring of happiness which supported him and refreshed him. Therefore when he speaks of "departing and being with Christ, which is far better," I think we must not suppose him to be speaking of his own case only, as an exceptional case, one of those grievously afflicted

lives which make men desire death merely as a termination of their earthly sufferings; but we must rather understand him as declaring, that to depart and to be with Christ is absolutely far better than life here, better for all, a higher state of being, an existence of greater blessing. And it is evident upon what ground S. Paul declares this preference; the departing is not a mere departing, but it is a departing "to be with Christ": the magnification of Christ was, as I have already said, the one great end of the Apostle's life; to realize Christ's love, to conform himself to Christ's image, to exhibit to mankind, not by word only but by life and example, a picture of the life of Christ—this was the thing for which the Apostle strove; and undoubtedly the light which ever shone upon his path was this, the entire belief that one day he should be with Christ and see Him as He is. The Apostle contemplated the Lord, as having gone before His people to prepare a place for them, as separated from them only for a while, as waiting to receive into His presence each servant who should have been faithful and true; what wonder then if the Apostle had a desire to depart? if in this life he had only a dim faint view of Christ, and yet found even that unspeakably brighter and better than anything else which he could see in this world,

what wonder if he desired that closer communion with his Lord, which he believed would be granted to him when he had put aside the burden of the flesh? I conceive therefore, that estimating good and evil as S. Paul would estimate them, to depart and be with Christ must be regarded as much better than remaining here: I do not say that we can all so regard it; but if we do not, it only shews that our spiritual vision is not so distinct as S. Paul's; and I do not wish to tempt you to fancy that you feel what you do not, I do not wish you to pretend to yourselves that you desire to depart, when you feel that your natural love of life gives the lie to such profession; I only wish you to see, that to a man standing at S. Paul's high spiritual point of view, the conclusion to which he came was sober and reasonable.

I must here however remark, that when S. Paul speaks thus, you are not to imagine that he speaks of the souls of the faithful, when departing from this life, entering at once upon the full fruition of all that God has prepared for them. This would be contrary to what seems to be revealed, and certainly contrary to what the Church holds to be true; there is, as might be expected, a very dark cloud between us and the other world, and only sufficient would seem to be revealed to guide

us and encourage us; it would appear that although the condition of departed saints is spoken of as being one of joy, and necessarily so if it be that of life in the presence of Christ, yet the full consummation and perfection of joy is reserved, until the number of the elect is complete, and the kingdom of God wholly come. You will remember that it is this for which we pray in the Burial Service, whenever we commit a new body to the earth to wait there for the resurrection of the just; and such a doctrine as this would appear to flow directly from that of the unity of the Church as one body having Christ for its head; for a Christian cannot be properly contemplated by himself, he is but a limb of a body, a part of a great whole, and the fulness of his spiritual joy cannot be dependent upon his own condition only, but must depend upon that of the whole body. Therefore when each Christian brother has gone to his rest, we may believe, and ought to believe, that he is in peace, that in some sense he is with Christ, and that it is far better for him to be as he is than to be with us here; and therefore we may rightly thank God, as we do, for having delivered our brother out of this world and taken him to Himself; in Scripture phrase we may say, that such are gone to be with Christ in Paradise; for this was, as you will remember,

the promise made to him whom Christ assured, while He hung upon the cross, of a happy issue to his troubles, "this day," said He, "thou shalt be with Me in Paradise": observe especially that Christ promises, that the change shall take place without delay, not after a long sleep, but "this day"; and again, that wherever His disciples should be it should be *with Him*, for He says "thou shalt be with Me"; and these two points being clear, we may be very well content to leave the rest in that obscurity which God has covered it withal. Only this is to be remembered, which I have observed before, namely, that the blissful change, which takes place when a saint of God is delivered from this world, is not to be so understood, as to be confounded with the perfect consummation of the glory of the Church triumphant in heaven, when the number of the elect is complete, and the kingdom of Christ established for ever and ever.

This is somewhat of a digression from the subject which I have immediately in hand, though a very natural one, and I think not useless; all that it is necessary for you to remark, so far as regards our present subject, is, that S. Paul had an intense perception of the blessing of going to be with Christ. The Lord Jesus being to him, without any affectation, the great and principal

object of personal love and reverence and fealty, he could imagine for himself nothing better than to leave this world, where he saw so much of the devil's work, and be in the presence of Him whom here he had only darkly seen. So that, as far as he was personally concerned, death seemed to him far better than life: but you will observe, that nevertheless he weighed the prospect of death very soberly against the prospect of life, and the manner of his doing this I wish particularly to bring before you. S. Paul appears as one, who, if he had his choice, would esteem death better than life, and yet preferred to live; and why? because he believed that to remain in the flesh was necessary for the good of the Church: now what I would have you to do is, to compare this reason for desiring life with the reasons which most of us have: many men have very gross reasons for desiring life, they look upon their lives as so much time given them for the gratification of their appetites, they look upon youth as the best part of it, because youth has the greatest capacity of enjoyment, and when they come to old age they wish their youth could come over again: others pass through life with no very positive end or aim, they are not much given to any one pursuit or pleasure, and their desire of life is a kind of natural instinct, such

as we all have more or less: then others desire life chiefly because they are afraid to die, the gnawings of a restless conscience within them makes them look upon death uneasily, and they desire to live because they dare not be judged: and so in other cases; there are abundance of reasons for desiring life, some are very bad reasons, some are good ones: but certainly, far the highest is that which is suggested by S. Paul; he looked upon life as a time given him, wherein to do certain work for the benefit of the Church, and the simple question with him was, whether his life or his death would prove most serviceable to the Church: if he imagined that his death was necessary as a testimony to the truth of the Gospel, then he would say, let me die; and if he thought that by living he could carry on an important work, which few were equal to carrying on, in building up the infant Church, then he would say, let me live; and in the text he tells us, that he has no doubt that his life will be spared, not because it would be better for him that it should be so, but because it would be more profitable for the Church.

Now when we read such a passage as the text, we are apt to pass over it as having very little personal importance to us; but there is no passage in the history of the mind and life of any great

and good man, which can be unimportant to the rest of his race; we are so bound up together and are so influenced one by another, that whenever any man thinks a great thought or does a great deed, he has not merely benefited himself, but he has benefited all mankind. This is why we publish the lives and thoughts of good men, not that people may read them and wonder, but that they may improve their own moral condition by contact with what is good and holy and true. Therefore, if S. Paul did actually arrive at such a state of mind, that he was able to balance life against death in the cool unselfish manner which I have described, it is a great fact for us all to think upon; if he was merely writing what he did not feel, then of course there is no value to be attached to it; but even if we did not reverence the text as part of the word of God, I think that I have said enough to shew that the language was probably the true utterance of S. Paul's heart, or rather I will omit S. Paul's name, and say that it was the true utterance of a human heart; it matters not who it was, the fact of importance is, that there once was a man who was able to estimate things according to quite other than the common rule, a man who did not care to live for living's sake, a man who came to the conclusion that death was better than life, and yet

preferred life for the sake of his brethren. You will easily understand me when I say, that a man, who has arrived at this state of mind, and has recorded the convictions of his soul, has put that in evidence which no one may ever after venture to neglect in making an estimate of man's condition in this world; persons may argue that it is impossible for any one to have any other end in living but his own enjoyment, and this is the way in which practically people do argue; but the evidence of S. Paul knocks down such an argument, because here we have an example of a man who actually had a very different end; or persons may say, that no one can possibly account death better than life, but here we have an instance of a man in sound mind who yet did so; it seems, therefore, that it is possible for a man to take higher views of life and death than men in general do take; it is possible, for S. Paul did so, and S. Paul was but a man, and what he did others may do too.

Now then, Christian Brethren, let us bring the subject to bear upon our own experience: here we are all placed in God's world, endowed with various powers and different talents, here we are to remain for some few years and then all to pass away; fifty years,—what is it in the history of the world? and yet in even fifty years how

many of us will still remain in this life? the question then forces itself upon us as reasonable creatures, what are we put here for? and why should we desire to remain? The answer is simple; we are placed here to work out our own salvation, and for the benefit each of the other; it is a high state of Christian life to be able to say with the Apostle, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better;" we may reason that it is better, but we may still feel the influence of the ties and affections, the hopes and excitements, of this life, so strong, that we should feel that we were guilty of hypocrisy if we said that we desired to depart; well, be it so—nothing can be further from the scope of true religion than to throw the mind into forced unnatural attitudes, and to tempt the lips to say that which finds no echo in the heart; and it need not distress any one to find that S. Paul's language is out of his reach, he had much better honestly confess that it is so than pretend that it is not; but if a man desire this life, at least let him desire it for some good end; let him take a deep sober view of his mission in the world,—aye, his *mission*—it is not too strong a word, for every one of us is *sent* for an important end, every one of us has his work, and his master who will demand an account

of it. And my subject leads me especially to speak of that mission which we have for the benefit of the Church and our fellows: I have already spoken of our prime work as that of working out our own salvation, but that is not all, we are all sent into this world to minister to our fellows, and so long as we are doing this we are doing God's work. This is the part of our mission which the text chiefly brings before us, because it is that which S. Paul alleges as his reason for desiring a prolonged life; but you will say, he was an Apostle—truly so he was, and this alters the degree of the work he had to do, but not the nature of it: then you may still say, it is a very good example for the clergy, they are S. Paul's successors in the ministry, they may well follow his example; truly so they may—God forgive us that we follow it so imperfectly,—but even with this interpretation, the meaning of the text is narrowed much beyond what is right: the thing which I wish to impress upon you all, Christian Brethren, is, that you are all successors of S. Paul in this respect, and that that which formed to him the principal charm of life ought to occupy a similar position in your minds to that which it did in his. Indeed, Brethren, we are all bound up together by ties infinite in number and incalculable in strength;

besides the ties of family and society, and the influence which is given to one over another by the unequal distribution of wealth, there are moral spiritual bands which bind us together, and make it possible for one man to produce upon his fellows an immeasurable influence for evil or for good; however young a person may be, or however old he may be, he has a large sphere of influence; the young man, who cleanses his way by taking heed thereto according to God's word, is preaching the fear of God, and therefore preaching true wisdom, in such a manner as cannot fail to *tell*; and the old man, who is old in holiness as well as in years, has numberless opportunities of doing good which are peculiar to him. So it is of all classes and conditions of men; "no man lives for himself, and no man dies for himself;" and if a man really looks upon his position in the world thus, if he looks upon his life not as a selfish possession of his own, but as a gift in which all his fellows have an interest and a share, and if he conducts his life under the sense of the responsibility which is thrown upon him, *then* he is taking a worthy view of his life, a view of which he need not be ashamed when the summons is sent, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." And I am sure that no other view of life can be at all put

into competition with this, as giving us a high view of our mission, and a source of hope and consolation when we come to die; and what other view do you think that you will wish to have had, when the throne is set and the books opened, and every man receives as he has done in the body whether it be good or bad?

SERMON XVII.

DUTY TO PARENTS.

PROVERBS i. 7, 8, 9.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge : but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother :

For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

MY discourse to you, Christian Brethren, will chiefly refer to the latter two of these verses, in which Solomon speaks of the duty and excellence of honouring father and mother : but I have taken the three verses for a text, because I wish you to see how that Solomon grounds the fear of God, the basis of the whole religious life, upon the duty of obedience to parents. He says, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and instruction ;” and it is to be expected from this opening, that he is about to describe the manner in which the wisdom of which

he speaks may be obtained, that he is about to give directions for leading a holy life; and indeed, in the verses following the text, he does give some very valuable advice and very fearful warning concerning the danger of being led away into sin; but before this come the latter two verses of the text, and in them he passes immediately from the fear of the Lord to the duty of honouring our parents. Do you not see something very striking in this? "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; but fools despise wisdom and instruction: My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother," as though the only way to attain to the fear of our Father in heaven were to commence by the fear of our father on earth, as though the fools who despised wisdom and instruction were generally identical with those, who would not listen to their fathers or who forsook the law of their mothers.

Now this view, which makes obedience to parents the basis of obedience to God, if a true view, is a very important one; and that Solomon intended to put the subject in the light I have represented, is I think clear from the whole book of Proverbs: that book is, as you know, very much taken up with advice to young persons; one great burden of it is the danger of young persons being led away by bad companions and

by youthful lusts, and the absolute need that exists for them, that they should base their whole lives upon the great principle of fearing God and keeping His commandments: but see how often throughout the book Solomon introduces the honour of father and mother, and especially note that the whole book is written as from a father to a son, and attention is claimed to its advice on the ground of the duty which the son owes to a father. Solomon evidently considered, that the duty which the conscience teaches all hearts, which have not been tampered with, to be due to earthly parents, was the best ground upon which to build the duty to God and the whole superstructure of a holy life: and in so considering he seems to me to have brought his teaching into accord with that of the Ten Commandments; for though the commandments which contain our duty to God are placed first, as indeed they ought to be, and even as Solomon makes the "fear of the Lord" to be "the beginning of wisdom," still when those commandments have been recited we come immediately (just as we do in the text) upon the command to honour father and mother, and we find that command distinguished from all the rest by a special sanction, a special blessing attached to the keeping of it; S. Paul calls it (you will remember) "the commandment with promise": the

other commandments may be supposed to be kept in order to avoid punishment; do not kill, lest thy blood be shed in its turn; do not steal, lest thou be punished; do not commit adultery, lest thou be stoned; do not bear false witness, lest thou be brought before the judge: but to honour father and mother is a command, which no human laws can support; if a man *will* dishonour his father and *will* break his mother's heart by neglect, there is no human help for it; and yet it may be as vile a sin as theft or murder, and therefore God gives to this command a peculiar sanction of His own, and attaches a special blessing to those who keep it well; do this commandment, not from fear of human law, but that it may be well with thee, that thou mayest be blessed in thy obedience, and that God may love thee. And I may remark, that as the Lord Jesus Christ set an example of obedience to this command by being subject to His human parents, so it was one great sign of the rottenness of the religious heart of the people of His time that the fifth commandment was much dishonoured: no one can doubt that the state of religion amongst the Jews of our Lord's time *was* very bad, hollow, empty, canting, hypocritical; and you will remember that one of the sins which the Lord charged upon them was this, that through their human traditions they had made void the

law of giving honour to parents; they set themselves free from the command of supporting their parents in age and weakness, by pretending to consecrate to God whatever should have been set apart for their parents' use; and this was so common a piece of hypocrisy, that our Lord names it and condemns it publicly as one of the sins of the times; and it is a circumstance not to be passed over in connexion with our present subject, that as a matter of fact this neglect of the duties of the fifth commandment was found in connexion with a condition of spiritual torpor, a condition of religious hypocrisy as gross as the world ever saw. Can we wonder, that those, who in so vile a manner broke the great law of duty to parents, were deaf to the preaching of Christ?

But now let me come more particularly to the subject of the text: and in doing so, let me make this remark which I consider important: when Solomon speaks of attending to the instruction of a father and not forsaking the law of a mother, you must remember that it is not mere *children* to whom he is speaking: it is clear from the whole spirit of the Book of Proverbs, from the kind of sins against which he gives warning, that he is addressing young persons who have come to that period of life at which they can go wrong if they will, when the actual restraint of parents

is past, when the choice between good and evil, between the fear of the Lord and the pleasures of sin, has to be made by themselves, when the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil come to try what kind of principles have been instilled into them during the days of childhood; it is the young man and the young woman, rather than the child, to whom the Book of Proverbs speaks, and if therefore young persons in reading that book regard all the words about duty to father and mother as mere nursery lessons, with which they at their time of life have nothing to do, they grievously miss the scope of many valuable passages. The words of the text, for instance, are not words addressed to children in a nursery, but to young men and young women, who have their companions to choose, and their Christian profession to maintain amongst those who would tempt them to evil, and amongst the fools who make a mock at sin. Look at the passage following the text, in which the young man is warned against the flattering seducing speeches of those who lie in wait for theft and to shed blood; or remember that passage in which the young man is warned, with a plainness and faithfulness which he will find nowhere except in Scripture, against the fair speech of her whose "house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death":

now such warnings as these are no warnings for children, but for those who have become more or less their own masters, and who are beginning life for themselves. What I wish you to note then is, that it is to young persons of this kind to whom are addressed the admonitions concerning the instruction of the father and the law of the mother; these too are no lessons for mere children, they are lessons for those who can disobey if they will, for those who will find that it will be accounted amongst many far from being noble and manly to think much of the instruction of a father, and quite childish and absurd to teaze oneself with submission to the law of a mother; that is the Devil's version of the commandment with promise; and what we have to do is to contrast Solomon's view of the commandment with this devilish one, and see which of the two commends itself to our hearts, our judgments, as the truest and best.

And I will call your attention to the figure, by which Solomon in the text illustrates the manner in which a young person should regard his duty to his parents. He says, "they," that is, the instruction of the father and the law of the mother, "shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck;" not a burden you will observe, but something to be worn for its

own beauty, and because it ornaments the person of the wearer; just as a person, who has been decorated for some gallant action in war, delights to wear the symbol of the approbation of his country. And the figure of the chain about the neck, if it intimates that obedience to parents is something to be gloried in, of course still more forcibly shews that it is nothing of which a young person need be ashamed; these ornaments of grace, of which Solomon speaks, would be certainly ornaments to be worn (as most ornaments are) in company, not such as a young person would wear in his own chamber, and then carefully conceal whenever he mixed with his companions. This is, I fear, the manner in which such ornaments (if ornaments they are considered) are too often worn, but this is not what was intended by Solomon; no, he intended to assert, that remembrance of the instruction of a father, and religious loving obedience to the law of a mother, were always the best ornaments a young man or young woman could wear, ornaments of which they need never be ashamed, chains better than gold or silver, which no fashion of the day should ever tempt them to lay aside.

Indeed it is a mark of a young person being very much fallen from the safe narrow path, when he allows himself to be tempted, whether

in company or in his own heart, to be ashamed or think lightly of the law of his father and his mother; it is not the ingratitude of the thing which presents itself so strongly to my mind (though that is bad enough) as the folly of it, the demonstration which it gives of the absence of that strength of character, that true wisdom, which I desire in all Christian persons to find. I have no deeper conviction than this, that supposing a mother to be imbued with the fear of God, and anxious to bring up her child in that fear, then the lessons which a young person receives in childhood from his mother are by far the most valuable which he ever does receive: you think that I mean the most valuable amongst his childish lessons—not at all—I mean of all the lessons which he receives from his cradle to his grave, and I believe that in so saying I am guilty of no exaggeration whatever. Let us consider the kind of lessons that a child receives from its mother, and then see whether this view of our obligation is not reasonable. For instance; one of the most important habits that a person can form for his whole life is that of being scrupulously regular in his private prayers, morning and evening: you will all feel the infinite importance of the habit of which I speak, and I need not enlarge upon it, because my only object

is to remark upon the manner in which the habit was formed: who taught us to pray, and furnished us with words suitable to our childish utterance, and made us kneel reverently on our knees, and taught us the solemnity of prayer, and so by God's grace laid the foundation of a habit, which all the temptations of youth, and (it may be) the occasional wanderings from the narrow way, were never able entirely to break and destroy? it was our mother who did this for us.

Or again: if we have in our hearts a love of truth and honesty, if we abhor a lie, and would rather be truthful than anything which this world could make us, where did we first learn this valuable lesson? I believe that there will be few of us, who cannot trace the formation of our minds in this respect back to our most childish days, and who will not affirm that books and sermons and masters never inspired us with a horror of a lie nearly so intense as that which we imbibed from our mother's lips; that the remembrance of her advice, and her horror of falsehood, and her manifest grief if she thought her child capable of deceit, has been amongst the principal safeguards of our own truthfulness and honesty; that the law of our mother, though it may be of a mother long since gone to her rest,

has been in this sense too a chain about our neck.

Or once more: with regard to all our religious impressions, our feelings of reverence for the Scriptures, our sense of the solemnity of public worship and the behaviour which is required in God's house, our sense of the duty of charity and brotherly love, our first thoughts of the greatness and majesty of God,—where did we get these? surely in most cases it was our mother who taught us, with such loving pains and adaptation to our infant weakness as few but mothers can. And not only do I ask, where did we get them, but I ask further, where did we ever afterwards get anything like them, anything half so sterling, anything that went so deep into our being and became so thoroughly a part of ourselves? I am persuaded, that although we may have put away childish things when we became men, though we may have had our views enlarged and may have found that there was much error mixed up with our childish thoughts, still those infant buds of religious impression and belief belong to the most valuable part of our whole religious history; and as, with regard to the body, no subsequent care can compensate for the neglect of a child in infancy, so I believe that, in general, unspeakable spiritual loss is sus-

tained by a child, who has not had in early days such mother's teaching as that which I have described.

And if this be so, that is, if the lessons of childhood which we learn from our mothers be really and truly the most valuable that we ever do learn, is not Solomon right in speaking of him as in the true road to wisdom, who reverences the law of his mother and wears it with pride as a precious chain about his neck, and in declaring on the other hand the folly and wickedness of him who despises his mother's lessons? Observe the point: it is not merely that gratitude to a mother for all her unspeakable love and forbearance and self-denial renders disobedience to her disgusting on the score of ingratitude, but it is that to think lightly of a mother's teaching is to think lightly of precisely that teaching which of all others from the cradle to the grave is the most valuable, the most entirely beyond price, the most influential upon the character of the man: and therefore I am prepared to take high ground upon the question, and I base the reverence due to the memory of a mother's lessons, not upon gratitude due for them though weak, as for toys which we broke and threw away, but upon the sound judgment of a manly intellect, which estimates that spiritual milk wherewith his

childhood was nourished, as the most valuable food his soul ever received.

I have laid, as you will observe, chief stress upon the reverence due to the law of our mothers, because that seemed the weaker point; and if a man reverences his mother's teaching, he will not be likely to disregard his father. And I think it cannot be in vain that I call your attention to this subject: apart from all experience one would have said, that to honour parents would have been the instinctive conduct of mankind, that the connexion between parents and children was such, the entire dependence of one upon the other during the years of helpless infancy so strong a tie, that reverence to the laws of father and mother would be the almost universal rule of life: yet the existence of the fifth commandment suggests, that there must be a tendency to dishonour parents, otherwise we should not have needed the command, and Solomon's forcible language proves the same thing, and our own experience confirms both. Beyond all doubt there *is* a tendency to shake off the law of father and mother, there is a tendency (which Satan will ever be ready to make the most of) to laugh at a father's commands, and to disregard a mother's wishes, and to be ashamed of wearing them as a chain about the neck conspicuous to all as the rule whereby

we govern our conduct. And beyond all doubt, this tendency is not a manly one, as many young people fancy, but a most childish and weak tendency; it indicates that a man has not the mind to discern what is really valuable and sterling, or that he has not the courage to take his stand upon the command of God and the dictates of his own conscience, and set the opinion of men at defiance. And therefore it is, that I would pray you all, my young friends, to lay Solomon's words to heart, and believe that there is that near relation between the fear of God and the reverence of father and mother which is intimated to us in the text. And I would have you to observe, how that the habit of mind which is indicated by the figure of the text, namely, "wearing the law of father and mother as a chain about our neck," is the habit of mind which leads to all high and noble feelings: give me a man who has shewn himself in all respects a good and dutiful son, and I have very little fear that he will be a good member of society, a loyal subject of the queen, a man of open and honourable heart, a good husband, and a good father; this will be the case, because excellence in all these conditions of life requires the same simplicity of heart, the same unselfishness, the same practical wisdom, and the same obedience to the behests of grati-

tude and of conscience, which the keeping of the fifth commandment requires.

Therefore I feel, my young Christian friends, that I cannot be too urgent in pressing upon you such words as those of the text. As often as in the course of our Sunday Lessons the Book of Proverbs comes to be read in its turn, I feel as though it were the Church's call to her ministers to address themselves to the peculiar wants of the young; and therefore I have in this sermon addressed myself to a subject, which is at the root of the whole Book of Proverbs, and which also lies at the root of your Christian life: and I pray you to think upon the subject carefully, and see how deeply it concerns you. I have not attempted, nor do I think it necessary, to enter into particulars concerning the manner in which each of you may obey the advice of the text; each one has his own peculiar circumstances, his own peculiar trials, his own peculiar temptations: what I wish to impress upon you is the *spirit* of the text, and if only you lay that well to heart, it will take root and bear fruit in your lives.

And let me say in conclusion, that unless a young person does keep the fifth commandment, I cannot think that any profession of religion which he may make can be worth much; if he

does not honour his father on earth, he cannot (I fear) honour his Father who is in heaven: you will remember the argument which S. John uses respecting brotherly love; he says, that he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen; and the argument which I have used is of the same kind, but still stronger; for the relationship of a child to his father is but the faint shadow of the relationship of a man to his Father in heaven; and the honour of one leads to the honour of the other; and if a young person profess to honour God his Father in heaven, and manifestly does not honour his father upon earth, then he had better look to it whether his life be not an empty show and his religion a lie.

SERMON XVIII.

THE LOSS OF THE SOUL.

S. MARK viii. 35, 36, 37.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it.

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

THESE very solemn words of our Lord are recorded by the three Evangelists S. Matthew, S. Mark, and S. Luke; and they are recorded by them all three as spoken in connexion with that remarkable confession of S. Peter concerning Christ, and the no less remarkable rebuke which immediately afterwards was administered to the same Apostle by his Lord. We cannot always feel certain that the various parts of the histories of the Evangelists are arranged in the exact order in which the events happened, indeed it is quite certain that this order is not strictly attended

to; but in the present instance, I think that the same arrangement being followed by the three Evangelists may be taken as sufficient evidence, that the words of the text were actually uttered by the Lord in that same connexion with S. Peter's confession and rebuke, which in the Gospels is assigned to them; and taking this to be the case, I think that we should look at the words of the text in this their real connexion, and see whether an additional force is not given to them by observing under what circumstances they were spoken.

Let us then look for a moment to the confession of S. Peter and the circumstances connected with it. There had been, as you must all have observed, a very remarkable reserve in the early ministry of the Lord; it is not to my purpose to discuss the reasons why our Lord adopted the course which He did, though it would be easy for me to say several things which might help to explain it; but it is sufficient to observe, that our Lord though preaching from the first the coming of the kingdom of God, yet did not assert the position which He Himself was to hold in that kingdom; He said "the kingdom of God is at hand," but He did not say, I am anointed of God to be a Prince and a Saviour, the true king of men, the promised seed of the woman,

the desire of all nations, the Immanuel of whom the prophets spoke: this He rather left His hearers to infer for themselves; He went about doing good, healing those oppressed with the Devil, curing diseases, and shewing forth by many mighty works that He was not a mere prophet of good things to come; and it was for those who watched the signs of the times, and were expecting (as many were in those days) the consolation of Israel, to draw the conclusion, "this is indeed the Christ." Now it was at such a time that the Lord asked the disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" and when they told Him that there were various opinions concerning Him, He put the question to themselves, "Whom say ye that I am?" and then it was that S. Peter shewed how much more deeply than others he had penetrated into his Master's character by replying, "Thou art the Christ." Now the chief point which I wish you to notice with respect to this confession, so far as regards my present subject, is this, the different trains of thought to which this confession gave rise in the mind of the Lord and the mind of S. Peter. You will perceive by looking at the history, that it was immediately upon this confession that the Lord began to prepare the minds of His disciples for His approaching sufferings and death; that

is to say, the fact of His being the great one that S. Peter asserted Him to be, the fact of His having so divine and superhuman a character, that (as Christ declared) S. Peter could only have known and believed it through the revelation of God, this fact at once led the Lord to speak of His humiliation and sufferings: as long as they knew Him only as a teacher, a prophet, so long they were permitted to indulge their fancy in the greatness which would be His and theirs in the coming kingdom of Heaven; but as soon as they knew Him to be Christ the Son of God, "then," or, as S. Matthew has it, "from that time forth," as though it afterwards became an integral part of His private instruction to them, "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things." Thus you will observe, that the greatness of His own being was by the Lord Himself immediately associated with His sufferings: He was Christ, that is the Anointed, but anointed to what? anointed to suffer; He was a Prince indeed, but the Prince of sufferers; He was to conquer His enemies and carry them captive at His chariot-wheels, but it was by suffering: it was no accident therefore (if we may so speak) that Christ commenced teaching, that He was about to suffer many things, at this particular time; if the disciples had now learned that

He was Christ, it was necessary that they should learn still more; if not, their knowledge would turn to poison, and their belief in the greatness of their Master would only puff up their minds with dangerous pride. And this necessity is evident from the manner, in which S. Peter received the Lord's announcement: elated apparently with the commendation which he had received, he took upon himself to rebuke his Master when He spoke of His sufferings and death: though he had been able to see so much of the Lord's character, yet his was but a worldly view after all; to his mind the sufferings of which the Lord spoke were signs of weakness, and if Christ were as great as he thought Him to be he could not believe that any such weakness could belong to Him; and the prospect of His future life, which the Lord sketched out for Himself, was altogether opposed to that which S. Peter had himself conceived. Thus you will observe that the same truth, namely, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of God, led the minds of the Lord and of Peter two very different ways; it led the Lord to declare His sufferings and humiliation; it led Peter to think such sufferings and humiliation impossible; the teaching of the Lord was, I am (as you confess) the Christ, and therefore I must suffer many things; the thought of Peter's mind was, our

Master is indeed the Christ, and therefore He will subdue His enemies, and found an everlasting kingdom, and no harm can happen unto Him. And the Lord characterized Peter's view as a low earthly view, not a divine one; He said, "thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men;" it was indeed exactly the view, which men unenlightened by the Spirit of God, men in their mere natural unrenewed state, would take of the Lord's greatness: what is it that gives to vulgar minds a charm in the notion of being a prince or a king? it is the notion of luxury and ease, unattended with care and labour and suffering: I do not say that such notions are not infinitely absurd, but unquestionably a king, if envied at all, is envied by thoughtless people because his condition is imagined as one too high, and too much separated from the rough workingday world, to be embittered by cares and sufferings and labours; "be it far from thee, such things cannot happen unto thee." And this was just the poor grovelling view, which Peter took of his Master's condition; a poor man standing to be spit upon and buffeted by rude hands, hooted by a mob, crucified like a thief, this was as far as anything possibly could be from the vision of greatness and majesty, which flashed upon S. Peter's mind when he confessed Jesus

to be Christ. And this view was that which savoured of the things that be of men; and that view which the Lord Himself took, and which so scandalized Peter's unenlightened mind, was that which savoured of the things that be of God.

Now I have thus at some length discussed the confession and rebuke of S. Peter, because (as I have already said) they seem to be closely connected with the solemn teaching of the text. The fearfully wrong view which S. Peter had taken of what was consistent with the character and office of the Lord, notwithstanding the wonderful revelation he had received concerning His true being, seems to have suggested (as it were) to our blessed Lord the necessity of publishing clearly and broadly certain essential laws of His kingdom. So He called to Him the people with His disciples also; for the lesson which He was about to teach was one for all ears, it could not be too extensively known nor too carefully pondered; and when He had called them He said, "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me;" thus He laid down selfdenial as the basis of His service, He did not wish any one to follow Him under false notions, He would not have them think that he would soon burst out from

His obscurity and divide wealth and honours amongst His followers; no, He would have them count the cost, and take this as the basis of all their reckoning, that to follow Him they must deny themselves; for His kingdom was in fact founded upon that principle, which S. Peter had not yet received; and as it followed, that *because* He was Christ, *therefore* He must suffer, so it also followed, that those who would be great in His kingdom must obtain their position, not according to the fashion of this world, but by denying themselves and taking up the cross.

Thus was the Lord led to speak the solemn words of the text: He has told the people that they must count the cost before they follow Him, and in order to help them to come to a wise and sound conclusion, He speaks to them, in that simple solemn manner in which no other man ever spoke, concerning the value of their souls. Let us consider for a moment the first verse of the text by itself: Jesus says, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it." Now a part of the meaning of this verse is manifest: it may be considered to teach, that any one, who, fearing the severe terms which Christ laid down for those who followed Him, should determine

to avoid the troubles of the Christian life, would not be any gainer thereby; whoever in this way tried to save his life would certainly lose it; Christ had blessings to bestow, which these poor cowardly creatures could never obtain; and contrariwise, any one, who, seeing the entire surrender of self which the Gospel required, should say, I am content, I will give up all, I will follow Christ,—any one, who should thus lose all earthly things, yea his very life, as a martyr for Christ's sake, would find a new life for that which he sacrificed, and an abundant return for all things which he gave up. In fact, the words which I am now considering would be as it were the breastplate of the early Christian martyrs; as they walked to death, as they thought upon the fiery trials which awaited them, they would need no other support than such words as these, "who-soever will save his life shall lose it; but who-soever shall lose his life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel, the same shall save it."

Thus to those whom Christ immediately addressed, and those of the times immediately following, these words would be a tower of strength; and even to ourselves they are very far from useless, if they teach us that no real happiness can be gained by shrinking from Christ's yoke, and that all that we do for Christ and all that

we give up for Him, and if need be all that we suffer for Him, will be richly rewarded by Him whom we serve. But in taking the whole text together a very important remark arises, which would not arise from the first verse taken by itself: in the first verse we find our Lord speaking of a man saving his *life* and losing his *life*, in the second and third we find Him speaking of a man losing his *soul* and making exchange for his *soul*: now any person acquainted with the original language of the New Testament will be aware, that the word translated in one place *life* and in the other place *soul* is one and the same word: I do not blame the translators for using two different words where the original uses only one, because there was obviously a difficulty in using only one, whichever they took: if throughout they had used the word *life*, then it would have seemed in the last two verses of the text as though the word applied only to our natural life in the body, "what shall a man give in exchange for his *life*?" the passage would not have had that awful force to our ears which it has now, "what shall a man give in exchange for his *soul*?" But on the other hand, if they had used the word *soul* throughout, then the first verse would hardly have been intelligible, speaking as it would of a man losing his *soul* for the sake of Christ and the Gospel.

So that one hardly sees what course remained, except that which the translators actually have taken, namely, to use the word *life* in one place and *soul* in the other. Yet I think it cannot be without meaning, that the same word is used in the three verses of the text; or to put the same thing in a broader light, it cannot be otherwise than an important fact for us to think upon, that the distinction between the *life* and the *soul*, which seems recognized in the English version of the text, has (so far as I am aware) no existence in the New Testament. I lay stress upon this, because I think that we are apt to fall into an erroneous way of speaking and thinking upon the subject; we speak of a man having a soul, as we might speak of his having a heart or a head, as though his soul were a part of him and not the man himself, as though a man without a soul were not a man without life, in fact no *man* at all, a man without that very principle of being which makes him a man. Now I think it far from unworthy of notice, that this way of speaking of men's souls is not in harmony with the New Testament; thus when Lazarus died we read that *he*, not his *soul*, was carried away by angels; and when the rich man lifted up his eyes in torments it was *he himself*, even he who was buried. So the Apostle says, "we shall all stand

before the judgment-seat of Christ;" and when he speaks more at length of the resurrection, it is *we* ourselves, our very selves, who are to be raised again in bodies glorified. And Christ did not say to the thief, Your soul shall be with mine, but, "This day *thou* shalt be with *Me*." If you look upon the New Testament with this point in view, you will I think see that the tone of its language is different from that used by many religious writers in these days: but you will say it is only a question of words, they mean the same thing; perhaps they may—but depend upon it, no incorrectness of words will very long be unaccompanied by an error of thought; thoughts are but invisible words, and words are embodied thoughts; and indeed in this case it is not difficult to point out the nature of the error to which this mode of speech leads; it leads directly to the notion that there is a distinction between the good of a man's soul and his own good; as though it were only upon the supposition of the man having this thing which we call a soul, that the ministers of the Gospel have a message which it is worth while for a man to hear: the Gospel, as I apprehend, is sent to men because they know what is right and what is wrong, and because their life is not bodily pleasure, but is union with God: suppose for an instant that there be no life after the

grave, or that, according to modern phrase, a man has no soul; still religion does not become a delusion, still man's happiness must exist where it exists now, even in the knowledge of God and in obedience to Him; a man need not wait until philosophers have settled the question of the immortality of the soul, before he makes up his mind to follow Christ; as long as he is a man and not a beast, so long is his life in God, and it will profit him nothing to gain the whole world and to lose that divine life. Observe, that I do not deny that our blessed Lord's words gain infinitely in awfulness of meaning, when we look upon that life of which He speaks as stretching out into eternity; I do not deny that the life which is saved is infinitely more worthy of being saved when it is commensurate with the life of Christ Himself, nor that the loss is less than infinitely unspeakable when it is a loss of life everlasting; but I do wish to express, that Christ came not to seek and to save anything short of our whole selves, and that in like manner the ministers of Christ (if I may so speak) desire the salvation not of *souls* but of *men*. I lay stress upon this point, because there is a kind of feeling in men's minds, that we the ministers of Christ's Church have a different end in view from other men who may desire the moral and social improve-

ment of mankind; that we have only to preach about men's *souls*, and about certain rewards and punishments which await those souls in another world, concerning which world it is obvious that a vast number of men think and care very little, if indeed they believe in it at all: now I on the other hand would maintain, that we have to speak of that which has the promise of this world and of that which is to come as well, that the godliness which we preach is profitable unto all things, profitable whether a man live thirty years or whether he live until the sun has burnt itself out, profitable because man *is* man, and not brute, profitable because a man's life is the breath of God, and if he lose that he loses himself. And I cannot help thinking that the appeal of a minister to his flock, especially if that flock be, as too many now-a-days are, overrun with ignorance and vice and infidelity, will be more convincing in proportion as they to whom he speaks are persuaded that the feeling of his heart is this, "I seek not something which belongs to you, but I seek you, your very selves."

And now what do we learn from the whole text? We learn that an earnest Christian life requires the sacrifice of everything which may be a hindrance to its growth; even a man's life must be jeopardized for that which is his true

life; and the gain of all things will be an infinite loss, if it entail the sacrifice of our spiritual life. I would only say concerning these most solemn warnings of the Lord Jesus Christ, Do we really believe them? there is nothing in them that we can very well disbelieve, their simplicity is so great, they appeal so immediately to our consciences, that we can scarcely help at once recognizing in them the solemnity of the words of God. What a simple question it is, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his *soul*, his *life*, himself?" The world is a great prize, judging according to human estimates; it includes all the wealth, the power, the pleasures, that human nature is capable of possessing and enjoying; yet what is it, if the man who has gained it has lost himself? you may say—truly—the enjoyment can last only for a time, and the joys of Heaven last for evermore; there is reason in that, Brethren, and yet I will give you what seems to me to be a higher reason still: do you remember that the offer of the whole world was once made to Christ Himself? do you remember how that once, in His mysterious temptation, He saw from an exceeding high mountain all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them? and they were all offered to Christ: by whom? by the devil: and on what

condition? that Christ would do homage to the devil for them: there I think you see, why a man who gains the whole world is an infinite loser; a man who gains the whole world must have the devil for his patron, and the devil for his liege lord; and he who has the temptation to possess it should use the answer which the Lord Himself used, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Yea, Brethren, to serve God and worship Him, especially as He has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ, this is the true life of mankind; to renounce the whole world, the flesh, and the devil, and instead of them to follow Christ in all gentleness and purity and lovingkindness, this is what we were devoted to in Baptism, and what our lives depend upon now. I know you believe this: God give us all grace to shew by our practice that it is no barren belief, but one which, as it will have everlasting life (we trust) for its end, so will have holiness here for its fruit.

SERMON XIX.

(Preached on the Sunday after Christmas Day.)

THE REVERENCE DUE TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

S. LUKE i. 46, 47, 48.

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden :
for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call
me blessed.

I THINK it will not be out of place, but on the other hand will be very fitting and convenient, that I should say something at the present season concerning the character of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the respect due to her. We have lately been occupied, indeed I may say that we are still occupied, with the thoughts of our blessed Lord's birth into the world; and though in the picture of the Nativity the divine Babe Himself should be the central figure, and the light which shines from Him should be that which illuminates

all the rest, still when we have reverently adored the infant Jesus, we may without forgetting Him turn our eyes upon some of the inferior actors in the mysterious scene. And certainly amongst these first and foremost stands the Virgin Mother: if we had any right to speak of one of the human race as more highly favoured than all the rest, I think we might be inclined to assign that first place to Her; for if we consider the divine nature of Jesus Christ, we shall conclude that the title of Mother of Jesus, involving as it does a nearer connexion with the incarnate Son of God than could be vouchsafed to any other, implying also a miraculous conception, and a greater amount of agency in bringing about the work of human redemption than belonged to any other of the human race, we shall conclude, I say, that the title of Mother of Jesus is the highest title which this world has known. And I think we cannot wonder, if under certain circumstances the reverence which our hearts so naturally and willingly and justly accord to the Blessed Virgin, should have gone beyond due bounds, and have degenerated into something very like that worship which is due only to God; and we cannot wonder, on the other hand, if at certain times a reaction should take place, and the perception of the wrong done to the Saviour of mankind by the

excessive devotion to her who required a Saviour herself, should lead to the other extreme, and tempt men to deny to S. Mary that honour which sober religion would accord to her.

Now as soundminded sons of the Church of England it becomes us to avoid all extremes, and while we eschew all idolatry, and all doctrine which has its foundation in a warm imagination rather than in Scripture and primitive tradition and reason, to assign to the Blessed Virgin that tribute of reverence and affectionate regard which her distinguished position demands. In these days especially I think that we ought to have our minds settled upon this subject, because there seems to be a tendency in some portions of the Roman Catholic Church to press even beyond all former precedent the *cultus* (as it is called) of the Blessed Virgin: I allude especially to the fact of a new doctrine respecting S. Mary having received the full sanction of that Church; and the doctrine is this, that as we believe the Lord Jesus to have been conceived without that original or birth sin, as it is called, which belongs to the whole human race, and as we accordingly speak of the conception of the Lord as an *immaculate*, or spotless, that is, a perfectly pure conception, so we are to believe that the conception of the Virgin Mother herself was of the

same kind, that she too was by birth pure, and had no inherited stain from Adam such as that which we call original or birth sin. Now this doctrine we may safely say is not in Scripture; and that it is not in accordance with reason would appear from this, that any argument which would prove the Blessed Virgin to have been different from the rest of mankind in her original spiritual condition, would prove the same of her parents, and so on in an endless line. And what is the effect of this doctrine? undoubtedly this—that it virtually lifts the Blessed Virgin out of the list of the human race, makes her something more than human, and may possibly be a step towards a still more fearful doctrine, I mean the doctrine of her divine nature. Whatever may be the result of this bold tampering with Scripture truth, I am quite sure that the effect must be mischievous, and that whatever apologies may be made, the false honour attributed to the holy Mother must have the effect of darkening, or at all events of confusing, the view of the greater Son.

Now then, Christian Brethren, turning away from this perversion of doctrine respecting the Blessed Virgin, let us endeavour to take a right and sober view concerning her true position and the honour due to her. And in the first place,

I would call your attention to the singular beauty and purity and steadiness of character, which are manifested in those passages of S. Mary's life which come before us in the Gospels: let me bring forward a few as illustrations. The first point that I will mention is the remarkable faith, with which she received the annunciation from the angel of the wonderful event which was to take place: her words are very simple and very full of faith, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word." And in accordance with this first expression of faith are the words of that beautiful hymn, part of which I have quoted for a text; in it she fully recognizes the greatness of the honour which is to be put upon her, and yet she does not impute it to her own merit, but to the will of God alone, that she is so raised above her fellows: if you examine that hymn you will perceive that its most marked feature is this, that it celebrates throughout the greatness and mercy of God, while it dwells upon her own lowliness; *she* is but the handmaiden of low estate whom God hath regarded, and whom all generations will call blessed on account of the honour bestowed by God upon her; it is *He* who being mighty has done great things and whose name is holy, *He* whose mercy is on them that fear Him, *He* who

shews strength with His arm, *He* who puts down the mighty from their seat, *He* who fills the hungry with good things, *He* who remembers His mercy and helps His servant Israel. If the Blessed Virgin has been exalted into an undue position among the Saints, we may safely say, that no protest against the false doctrine can possibly be stronger than that which we find in her own words.

Again, the manner in which, as we read, Mary pondered in her heart the various events of the Lord's childhood, which seemed to point out her Son as being greater than even she herself had suspected, is worthy of notice as being precisely that which befits a religious character of the highest order. When the shepherds came to Bethlehem and did homage to the infant Saviour, and told of the angels' hymn which they had heard as they watched their flocks, we read that they who heard wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds, but Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart: she knew more than those who were standing round concerning the child, and yet she seems to have suspected that even she did not know all that one day would be revealed; and therefore she was still, and waited until God's good time should reveal the whole truth.

The same religious discretion marked her conduct on the occasion of her losing sight of Jesus on their return from Jerusalem, when He was twelve years old: you will remember His words to His parents, when they found Him in the Temple, "How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" an answer which might well add to their perplexity, and which His Mother does not seem to have understood; but she did not forget the saying because she could not understand it, on the other hand she kept it in her heart.

Quite in accordance with this temper and conduct is the incident, which S. John relates concerning the marriage in Cana of Galilee: you will remember how that when the Blessed Virgin appealed to her Son because there was no wine, He rebuked her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come:" she does not resent the rebuke, but says to the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

Now such notices as these all point to a certain high religious character, which indeed we might expect to find in her who was chosen for so great an honour, as that of being the human Mother of the Lord. They are characteristic of a person, who being placed in very difficult circumstances, where great faith and discretion and fortitude were

required, acted in a manner worthy of her position ; and the little notices we have of her life prepare us for finding her nearest to the cross, when the last awful scene took place which was to pierce her own soul as with a sword, and for finding her name amongst those who were assembled together in Jerusalem after the resurrection to await the coming of the Holy Ghost. " Quietness and confidence," those chief marks of mature Christian character, seem to be precisely the marks of the character of the Blessed Virgin ; one who could wait God's time, and be neither puffed up with honour nor depressed by affliction, but in the most difficult and most painful, and yet the most honourable position ever assigned to one of our race, could abstain from all that was unworthy of a saint and walk humbly with God.

Thus I think that the study of the life of S. Mary, as we are able to make it out from the fragments which the Gospels contain, leads us to think highly of her saintly character. We are not bound to compare too curiously those, who, whatever may be their excellences, require to be washed in the same blood, and are inspired by the same Holy Spirit ; and therefore we are not bound to set S. Mary beyond all other saints as to goodness and holiness, but we are bound to recognize the extreme beauty and purity of

her character, and to acknowledge that we can find none, who would seem, even to our imperfect judgment, to be worthier of the honour which was assigned to her.

But it is not her own excellence, which specially exalts the Blessed Virgin; it is the honour which was put upon her, independently of all merit of her own. I have already called your attention to the manner in which, when speaking her own thoughts concerning the honour put upon her, she says, My soul doth magnify the *Lord*; and truly this is the right view to take of the matter; no one could *deserve* the honour of being the mother of Christ, and she who was selected for that honour was chosen because it was God's good will to give it to her. And when we think upon all that is implied in the saying, "she brought forth her firstborn Son, and called His name Jesus," when we consider what manner of child it was that she brought forth, we may feel inclined to wonder at her lot, and exaggerate the glory of her condition; and this is what has been done, and Christ our Lord seems to have anticipated that it was likely so to be, and more than once He rebuked the feeling which in later times has led to such unhappy results: you will remember how that upon one occasion, when a woman in the crowd cried out, "Blessed is the

womb that bare Thee and the paps which Thou hast sucked," the Lord replied, "Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it;" and again when He was told that His mother and His brethren desired to speak with Him, He said, "Who is My mother, and who are My brethren?" and then stretching out His hands towards His disciples He said, "Behold My mother and My brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother." The spirit of these sayings of our Lord is not to be mistaken; He would have us see that there is a spiritual union with Himself, which every humblest Christian may have by faith and holiness, which infinitely transcends in closeness and in vitality even that union which bound Him to His human Mother: He would have us not regard any human relationship to Himself according to the flesh, as comparable with that relationship which members of His Church have with Him as their spiritual and lifegiving head: and I can hardly account for the very pointed manner in which the Lord protested against the magnification of human relationships to Himself, except by supposing, that the words were spoken with reference to the errors which He foresaw would creep into His Church from this very source in after days.

Nevertheless we need not flinch from according to S. Mary the honours which belong to her: "All generations shall call me blessed," says the text; and we must have dull hearts if we do not so account her: and there is one effect which the honour put upon her has had upon the human race, which may be mentioned by the way, and which I the rather notice because I do not remember to have seen the point touched upon; and it is this, the manner in which the weaker sex is regarded by the stronger among Christian nations: I think, without entering deeply into the question, which time will not allow, it may be asserted, that before the religion of Christ governed the manners of mankind, that honour and equality was not accorded to women which by divine right belongs to them; nor is it now accorded in any nation but those which are Christians, not among Jews, nor Mahometans, nor Hindoos, nor among any savage nations: I cannot but trace the difference in this respect amongst Christian people to the honour put upon women in the person of the Blessed Virgin: if in the generally depressed condition of the weaker sex, we see the accomplishment of the special curse put upon woman's sin in Paradise, may we not also see the removal of the curse, when the fulness of time was come, and woman who

brought sin into the world was also through God the means of bringing into the world the Redeemer and Destroyer of sin?

But this by the way: I was remarking that we ought not to flinch from according to the Blessed Virgin the honour due to her; and as we honour the Apostles because they were very near to and much honoured by the Lord, without asserting that they have any actual relation to God which we may not have, so may we rightly honour the Virgin Mother of Christ, without any extravagant views of her nature as being different from or higher than our own. But men have gone further; they have raised the Blessed Virgin out of the ordinary class of Saints, and have assigned her a position of her own, and a position fearfully like that which ought to be occupied only by her divine Son: and how has this come about? I think it has arisen in this way: in adoring the divine nature of Christ, I think that men rather lost sight of His manhood; I do not mean that they would deny His manhood, but that the manhood did not present itself to them sufficiently clearly and constantly: persons sometimes find fault with the Roman Catholics, because they dishonour the Son by putting the Blessed Virgin in His place, and this may to a certain extent be true; but it is true, not because they

have forgotten the Divinity of Christ and made His Mother divine instead, but because they have forgotten His manhood, and have been led to make the Blessed Virgin the mediator, instead of the Man Christ Jesus. This has been admitted by one of the most subtle of the recent converts to Romanism; he speaks of a chair being left vacant in Heaven by the declaration of the essential Deity of Christ, and of the Blessed Virgin occupying that chair. This may be a very shocking mode of speaking of what is in fact the bringing in of a new Gospel, but I believe that it expresses to a certain extent the truth: God became man in the person of Jesus Christ, in order to redeem mankind and make them one with God: the doctrine of Scripture is uniformly this, that because Christ is man, therefore He is "the way, the truth, and the life," that through Him we have access to the Father, that the "Word became flesh," and so men received "power to become the sons of God:" thus the human nature of Christ becomes a main doctrine of the Gospel, no less than the divine; they are, so to speak, the two ends of Jacob's ladder, that ladder which joins Heaven and Earth; if the divine nature of the Lord enable that ladder to rest in Heaven, the human is no less necessary to enable it to rest upon

Earth; and if by a forgetfulness of the human nature of Christ, as compared with the divine, men deprive themselves of the mediator between God and man which their hearts tell them they require, what remains but that they should set up a new mediator? and who so likely to be chosen for the usurped seat as the Mother of the Lord?

But however this may be, I am quite of opinion that the true antidote to all improper views of the condition of the Blessed Virgin is a proper and complete view of the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ. While we reverence S. Mary as one of the first of Saints, while we call her blessed, and think her the most highly honoured of the human race, we shall still feel no temptation in our hearts to worship her, (even in that modified way which the Roman Church distinguishes from the worship due to God,) provided we have our whole souls filled with the contemplation of the Saviour Jesus Christ. And to contemplate Him fully as our Saviour and Mediator, we must regard Him as we do at this season in His humanity: if we estimate aright the divine condescension implied in His birth into the world, if we understand those words of the Apostle, "though rich for our sakes He became poor,"

if we regard His humiliation as an actual and infinite self-sacrifice, we shall feel that there is no need for, and no room for, any other mediator between God and ourselves besides Him. Men may think that they honour Him by regarding Him as exalted so high, that their prayers cannot reach Him unless conveyed by some lower mediator; but I think that to a really reflecting mind men do thus unspeakably dishonour Christ, and rob Him of the chief jewel of His crown as the Lord and Saviour of mankind: it cannot be to honour Him, to set up under any pretence whatever other mediators between God and man beside Himself: it cannot be really pleasing to the blessed woman who was privileged to be His human mother, if indeed she be able to know what men do upon this earth, it cannot be pleasing to her, I say, to be placed in a position which she more than any other knew to belong only to Him, whom though coming after her she recognized as her Lord as well as her Son. God forgive those who thus mistake His Gospel, and give the enemies of religion occasion to blaspheme: for ourselves, Christian Brethren, I believe that we have no particular cause to fear any such tendencies to false worship, but I think that we shall do well to take this warning, that we bear constantly in mind the doctrine of our Blessed

Lord's humanity. What we believe is, that Jesus Christ, by assuming human flesh, joined together two natures the human and the divine never to be divided; we believe that by this union He became not only our Redeemer but our Mediator, that He stands now at the right hand of God making intercession for us, that we need no other mediator, no other intercessor. This will be His office until the number of the elect is accomplished and His kingdom comes: and none can be a more willing mediator between God and man, than Him who humbled himself unspeakably that He might be able to do this very thing. God grant then, Christian Brethren, that we may live continually and practically in this faith, ever looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, and hoping, with the Blessed Virgin and all other Saints, to meet one day in His kingdom to praise the condescension and love of Him who is the common Saviour and Lord of both us and them.

SERMON XX.

BECOMING LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN.

S. MATTHEW xviii. 1, 2, 3, 4.

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying,
Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in
the midst of them :

And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted
and become as little children, ye shall not enter into
the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child,
the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

THE account of this transaction is found, with some slight variations, recorded by three out of the four Evangelists. If it were to my purpose I might notice this as a very striking mark of the candour and honesty of the Evangelists, that they should thus have been careful in recording a story which manifestly does not tend much to the honour of the first Apostles of Christ; at the same time, the very emphatic manner in which

our Blessed Lord taught His lesson prevents us from wondering that His lesson was remembered; so that viewing it in this way, we are not surprised that the story should have been generally diffused throughout the Church and known to all the Evangelists; for often, one may fancy, if any of the early disciples felt within the motions of ambition or jealousy or pride, that scene would come to his mind, in which the Lord, wishing to shew who should be greatest in His kingdom, had set a little child in the midst of them. Now I propose to consider this very important teaching of our Blessed Lord in two ways, which will probably give greater distinctness to the remarks which I may have to make: in the first place, I shall consider the story related in the text more especially with reference to the disciples to whom it was addressed; and this I shall do principally with a view to introduce the second part of the subject, which will be the more general consideration of the text as applying to ourselves, or to the whole Christian Church.

S. Matthew represents the disciples as coming to their Master with the question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" S. Mark and S. Luke both speak of our Lord Himself being the first to mention the subject; they also mention that there had been a private dispute

amongst the disciples upon this question, which of them should be the greatest: perhaps the complete account would be that the disciples disputed on the way to Capernaum, as both S. Mark and S. Luke assert; that our Lord had perceived that such a dispute had been going on, and therefore Himself exposed the disease in order that He might heal it; that the disciples first held their peace, being ashamed as S. Mark speaks; and that lastly, when pressed and reassured by their Master, they propounded their question to Him in some such form as that recorded by S. Matthew. But however this may be, it is quite necessary to bear in mind the dispute by the way, of which S. Mark and S. Luke inform us, in order to understand the ground of the question proposed by the disciples in the first verse of the text; it was no mere idle speculation, it was a question in the answer to which unfortunately they felt themselves personally interested: and if we inquire what was the cause of such a question arising in their minds, or (which is the same thing) what was the occasion of that dispute for precedence which had taken place, it is not hard to conjecture; for you will see by reference to your bibles, that the event of the text followed upon two or three others, in which honour had been given to certain of the disciples before the rest;

especially I may refer to the transfiguration on the Mount, which had been witnessed by Peter and James and John: it is true that the rest did not know how great a vision had been granted to these three, forasmuch as the favoured disciples were especially commanded to keep secret what they had seen until after the Lord's resurrection: but perhaps this secrecy may even have added to the jealousy which the rest of the disciples felt, and perhaps the three might even have been exalted above measure by the honour put upon them, and might have looked down upon their fellows: anyhow we can see in the history of the transfiguration abundance of cause for a dispute amongst the disciples, in the state of mind in which they then were, as to who should be chief amongst them. Moreover our Lord had some time before spoken to S. Peter in such a manner as might have roused the jealousy of the rest; it was not long since Peter had made that remarkable confession, concerning the Saviour's godhead,* which had drawn from our Lord those strong expressions of approbation, which concluded with the words, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on

* Matt. xvi.

earth shall be loosed in heaven;" there was much in expressions like these to give S. Peter a precedence, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of others; and we have perhaps an example of each of these results; for in the first place, we find him immediately after taking upon himself to rebuke the Lord, when He spoke of His approaching sufferings and death, a rebuke which brought upon him those sharp chiding words, "Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art an offense unto Me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men;" and in the second place, we find that when Jesus and His disciples were come to Capernaum,* the receivers of the tribute-money came to *Peter*, saying, "Doth not your Master pay tribute?" as though either Peter put himself before the rest, or they appeared to acknowledge him as the first. And indeed some have thought, that it was our Lord's conduct in this latter transaction, which gave rise to the jealousy amongst the disciples; for our Lord having directed Peter how he was to find a piece of money, says to him, "that take and give unto them for *Me and thee*;" thus, as the others might perhaps imagine, taking Peter away from the rest into a special kind of partnership with himself. It is not, however,

* Matt. xviii.

necessary to sift all these conjectures; it is quite sufficient for me to have shewn, that there had of late been circumstances in the history of the disciples calculated to stir up feelings of jealousy and envy, in order that you may be able to enter somewhat into their feelings when they inquired of their Master, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" The fact is that the Lord had recently spoken to them of the coming of His kingdom as of a thing near at hand; He had said, "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom;"* and they, probably mistaking these words, and imagining that the kingdom of David was again about to be established in Jerusalem in tenfold majesty, were jealous of any mark of favour given to one above another, as indicating that such an one would be preferred before the rest in this kingdom; their eyes as yet required purging, their hearts to be enlightened; they knew not what this kingdom was, of which they spoke so freely; they prayed daily in the words which Christ taught them, "Thy kingdom come," and doubtless they were earnest in the prayer; they thought that in praying for that, they were praying for their own

* Matt. xvi. 28.

advancement and glory, and they did not realize the truth that in so praying they were asking for that, which would be realized in their own sufferings and persecutions and cruel deaths. To us it may appear strange, that the various hints of our Lord respecting the real meaning of His kingdom had not as yet enlightened the disciples' eyes; and doubtless they too, after the illumination which came upon them on the day of Pentecost, looked back with wonder upon their blindness during their Lord's lifetime to that which afterwards appeared so plain; but such is the gradual development of the knowledge of the kingdom of God, and we may see it illustrated in that miracle of restoring the blind man to sight: first he saw men as trees walking, not totally blind but with only indistinct glimmerings of the truth,—such was the condition of the disciples during their Lord's lifetime; afterwards he saw all things plainly,—a full and distinct vision, such as the disciples had when the Comforter had come to bring all things to their remembrance, and lead them into all truth.

Having then these partial half-worldly notions of what was meant by the kingdom of Heaven, the disciples referred their dispute to Christ, saying, "who is the greatest in that kingdom?" And the answer which our Lord made, though

it did not give them any particular light as to the manner in which the coming of His kingdom should be realized, did yet give them a view of one leading feature of that kingdom, and impressed it upon them in such a manner that they could never forget it. Our Lord does not say, "the man who is holiest is the greatest in My kingdom," for then there might have been a strife as to who was holiest, and nothing could possibly be more alien to the spirit of His kingdom than for one to say to another, "Stand apart, I am holier than thou;" neither does He say, he is greatest who has the strongest faith in Me, or who is the most charitable, or who is the most forgiving, although any one of these answers might have been true; because to have given any one of these would have involved exactly the same difficulty, as that which I have just now criticised; they would all have shifted the difficulty, and not have got rid of it; for it is just as easy, and just as odious, for men to dispute amongst themselves which is the strongest in faith, which is the most charitable, or which is the most forgiving, as to dispute which shall be greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. And were it necessary, it would be very easy to shew, that Christendom has smarted from this very thing; that is, from men striving to make themselves appear

to others as more saintly than their brethren, and that not by doing their duty in the state of life to which it has pleased God to call them, but by doing actions and acquiring habits the very end of which is to lift them out of the common herd, and mark them out above all others as emphatically *Saints*. I am of course alluding to the continual addition of the names of saints to the Calendar which was once almost universal in Christendom, and which had the effect not only of injuring the character of the saints themselves, but also of grievously darkening the view, which the Church was able to obtain, of Him who alone is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, even Jesus Christ Himself.

Now how did our Lord meet the difficulty, which lay in the way of giving a true answer to His disciples, and yet one which could not be abused? in a manner which speaks His wisdom in a wonderful way. He takes a little child, and sets it in the midst of them as a pattern and example; and He says, "Except ye be converted," that is, except ye be altogether turned from your present jealous, ambitious, rivalrous state of mind, "and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven;" not only ye shall not be greatest in that kingdom, but ye shall not enter it at all; "whosoever therefore

shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven." Now it is obvious, that there is much in the character of a little child, from which the disciples of our Lord, as ourselves, might learn lessons of great value to their souls; childlike gentleness, teachableness, obedience, truthfulness, purity, in fact the apparent absence of all the evil qualities and passions, which though existing in the child's heart in the seed have not yet become visible, all these characteristics of a child may be held up to men by way of a parable to teach them what they ought to be: but I apprehend there is one special quality of the mind of a little child which our Saviour intended principally to hold forth in the text, and this is its unconsciousness of any dignity belonging to it or to its actions; "whosoever shall *humble* himself," says our Lord, "as this little child;" the little child performs its actions from an impelling instinct, without considering whether they will tend to raise it or to depress it above its fellows; it is perfectly simple and unaffected in all its aims; it does not compare itself with others or feel envy of them: I am not praising the little child for these things, they merely arise from the fact of the child's mind and feelings being at present merely in the seed; I think it is a very sickly kind of

religion, which leads us to speak of the deeds of little children as really more pleasing to God than our own; I have heard it said that their worst actions have perhaps less of sin mixed with them than the best of ours, and I think such an opinion monstrous and absurd; still the character of mind belonging to little children may very well be made to yield a lesson by Him, who sends us for wisdom even to the lilies of the field. And the mighty destiny, and mysterious greatness, of a little child, taken in connexion with the simple manner in which it performs all its actions with no thought of its own dignity, and no jealous wish to raise itself beyond others, give us an admirable picture of the state of mind which Christ would implant in His disciples. They had asked, Who was the greatest in His kingdom? in reply He held up for their imitation one whose characteristic was this, that he never asked such questions at all; it was not a *Christian* question, so to speak, which they had asked, and therefore the Lord pointed out for the type of the great ones in His kingdom a little child, which from the very condition of its childhood was incapable of comparing itself and saying, Am I greater than my brethren? And the character of the Apostles in after times is a very good commentary upon our Lord's lesson; for we see

them all working together with one end, namely that of founding the Church, not desiring each to record His own name, but simply to make men reverence the name of Christ: and if on one occasion S. Paul seems to deviate from the general tone of conduct belonging to the Apostles, if he exalts himself above others and boasts of what he has done, it is with the protest that he is speaking foolishly because others have compelled him; and when speaking the genuine feelings of his own heart, he gives them utterance in such words as these, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ."

But I must now pass on to say something of the lesson of the text, as it applies to ourselves or to the Church generally; and it is obvious that the lesson which the disciples were chiefly intended to learn is not without its value for ourselves; for it points out to us the manner in which we are to walk along the narrow way which leads to life, ever pressing towards the mark, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, without looking upon other things, and without comparing ourselves with others who are striving for the same crown. For in this the heavenly race in which we are engaged differs from those earthly races with which it is so often compared,

namely, that in them there are but a few prizes, and the very question which forms their life and soul is this, Who is greatest? who is the first? and consequently their spirit is essentially one of rivalry, and jealous pressing one before another; but in the heavenly race there is no limit to the number of incorruptible crowns to be bestowed, "in My Father's house," saith Christ, "there are *many* mansions;" and moreover, it is God alone who can tell which is foremost in the race; man's judgment on that matter is worth very little; "many," saith Christ, "who are first shall be last and the last first;" and thus that jealous rivalry, which forms the very life of a race for an earthly crown, has no place in the race for a heavenly; the principle of the two is not the same, and he is probably first in the Christian race who most shrinks from the question "Am I first?" or (speaking of the kingdom) he is probably greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, who having striven to the utmost to glorify God has least troubled himself with the question "Who is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?" Thus the lesson, which our blessed Lord specially designed to teach His disciples in His own day, may be a lesson for us in these days; for although we know more than they did of the nature of His kingdom, and are not likely to be deceived

by any temptation to rivalry exactly similar to that which came upon them, yet still we may learn that true healthy Christian life consists in a continual looking off from ourselves and also from our neighbours, in a continual looking to Christ, in a simple, earnest, hearty endeavour to do God's will while life and strength last, leaving all questions as to who shall be first, or who last, to the decision of Him who will one day call all to a reckoning and give to each man according as his work shall be.

But in applying to ourselves the lessons which may be learnt from the example of a little child, we may with advantage give to our thoughts a somewhat wider scope; for it is unquestionably true, as I have already remarked, that many of the qualities, which belong to a little child, are forcibly typical of the qualities of mind, which ought to belong to a Christian. This is a subject very easy to follow out, but one which I do not desire to enter into just now except in one particular point; our Lord speaks of our humbling ourselves as little children, in order that we may be great in the kingdom of Heaven, and it will at once occur to you that this includes intellectual humility, that is, that we are to humble our minds, our intellects, before the mysteries of God's revelation, if we would enter into, much more if we

would be great in, His kingdom. Now I think it well to say a few words upon the manner, in which a little child is to be our example of humility, with regard to the exercise of our reasoning powers in matters concerning religion. It is sometimes said, and said truly, that faith and not reason is the basis of religion, and it is rightly asserted, that by reason alone a man cannot find out God; men have tried to do so and failed; but is it true that reason has no place in religion, and is obliged to give way when its conclusions are contrary to the truths revealed? this cannot be a just view of the case; God gave man his reason to be his light and his guide, and under no circumstances to be hid under a bushel; faith and reason are not enemies, but the joint supports of the religious life. This we shall see better by comparing religion with any human science; we know for instance much concerning the heavenly bodies, their motions, their distances, and the like; how did we acquire this knowledge? reason alone could not help us; men tried for ages to deduce a true theory of God's universe from their own minds; they failed, as well they might; at last they found it necessary to examine patiently and humbly what God had actually revealed to them in the heavens; by this patient examination they found a sure foundation,

on which their reason could take its stand: here then in a matter of mere human science was a case, in which men found it necessary to humble themselves as little children; and the result justified the sacrifice; the method was far less showy and pretentious than that which put the human reason alone to devise a universe for itself, but at the same time it was far more fruitful, and those who humbled themselves were soon exalted before those who humbled themselves not. And be it observed, that in this case the reason was not deposed from its lawful position, and from its proper rights, but from a position which it never ought to have occupied, which it was destruction to itself that it should occupy; and also that the result of tying down the reason to its proper province, was to give it such victories in natural science as it had never achieved before. Now let us see what light this will throw on the relation, which reason ought to bear to faith in the case of religion: reason left to itself ends in idolatry, or in something akin to it; it would end in mere cold empty general conclusions respecting the Creator, but the heart of man will not rest in such cold conclusions, it finds no comfort in them, it says, "give me something nearer to me than the unseen power which created all things," and so it forces the reason into some

system of idolatry to satisfy its own restless cravings. Now here it is that faith steps in, and holds forth for the belief of mankind the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, not as in any way opposed to reason, but as supplying a foundation for the reason to work upon which, it never could have found for itself; and the thing in which we are to imitate little children is this, that we are to believe simply and gratefully that truth which God has revealed to us, namely, that His Son has visited us in great humility, that God is not far from us, but has once become man and so for ever taken up our manhood into God; and having once accepted this truth in all its marvellous depth and yet marvellous simplicity, then we may seek in it the highest subject for the exercise of our intellectual powers. And as we found that in human science the humbling of the mind led to abundant fruits, so here we may truly say, that the receiving in faith the message of the Gospel, so far from prostrating the reason, will tend more than any other thing to expand the human mind and enlarge its discoveries. Need I point in proof of this to the fact, that learning and science and civilization have made their most rapid and permanent advances in Christian countries? or need I tell you, that whatever scoffers may say,

yet there have been men of the very highest order of mind, who have professed to find in the religion of Christ not only a solace in weary hours, not only a comfort to their hearts, and an appeal to their feelings, but "the perfection of human intelligence," that in which when once revealed their highest reason found its widest field, its deepest satisfaction? Thus then I would say, Brethren, imitate little children in the matter of the relation in which your reason stands to your faith: God reveals to you that which you could never have found out for yourselves, and which therefore it becomes you to receive at His hands humbly and thankfully; God reveals to you that He has come amongst you, has taken your nature, your troubles, your pains, your fears, and He wishes you to receive this as a little child receives its first instruction, undoubtingly, and yet as that, which, the more you examine it and weigh it, will the more approve itself to you as the very highest wisdom. Doubtless, while we are here we must always to some extent be children; the mysteries of God are too deep to be measured by any plumbline which our intellect can supply; but of this we may rest assured, that if we first receive God's revelation with a little child's humility, and when we have received it walk with a little child's purity and

simplicity, then we shall be able to grow in the knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, until we come to that blessed state in which we shall know even as we are known.

THE END.

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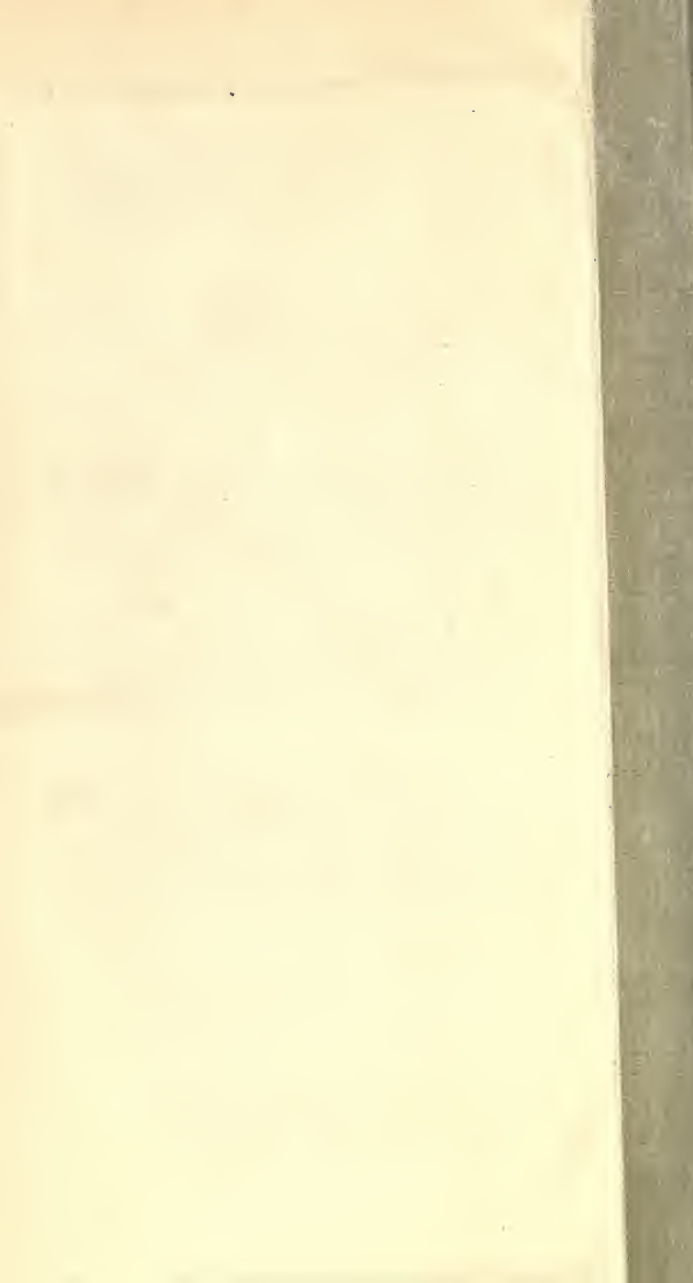
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